

One Last Scare

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Summary: An aged Michael Myers returns to Haddonfield thirty-five years after his original massacre for one final night of terror. This time he sets his sights on a teenage boy with a darkness all his own. Ignores movies 4-6.

1. Chapter 1

Evil had lived in Michael Myers for fifty years, festering inside of him like a disease, poisoning his veins with a darkness that blackened his eyes. Innocence had been ripped from him at the young age of six and he had never once reclaimed it. Halloween night belonged to him in Haddonfield ever since the night his evil had driven him to brutally murder his sister. Had he not had the naiveté to walk expectantly into the arms of his disbelieving parents he would have had many years of freedom to lay his blade into the residents of that little Illinois town.

But something small had remained within him that night, a last shred of childlike innocence kept burning in the surrounding darkness like Hope at the bottom of Pandora's Box.

He refused to let that spark thrive, even in the asylum where his only defence against the mind numbing boredom had been to withdraw into himself completely. Catatonia they had called it, brought on by the shock of what he had done that night. He'd managed to fool them all for seventeen years, delaying natural responses, refusing to let humanity in, continuously dwelling on keeping that damnable light suppressed. It was a meditation of sorts, letting his hatred for those who should have taken care of him and his sister snuff the child within out like the flame of a jack-o-lantern.

Only Loomis had seen through it. Patient and genial at first the good doctor became both a friend and foe of Michael, who had viewed the man with a great deal of curiosity and mingled irritation. The man's feeble attempts to help Michael had both fuelled his malevolence and

worked to add minuscule kindling to the little boy who was crying out from underneath that darkness. As the years passed and Loomis' attempts to reach him transformed into a quest to see him properly locked up Michael had almost wanted to laugh. It was funny to him, to the evil shape that had filled itself into the form of a human, to see this middle aged fatherly man brought onto near hysteria by his efforts. People had started whispering about Loomis in the halls of Smith's Grove, saying that he was getting as crazy as his patients.

Michael had not been able to tolerate such slights. He had but to stare at the offending orderlies who dared mock the only person who could somewhat understand him and they would scurry away like frightened rabbits.

Had Fate not intervened that weekend in autumn when he was no longer a lanky teenager but a powerful young man he would have gladly continued his game of mental tag with Loomis until old age finally claimed the man. But on that overcast, chilly day one of the new orderlies, a youth hailing from Haddonfield, had ignorantly let it slip that Michael's sister had recently made the honour roll in high school.

With that, the eye of his seventeen year long psychological hurricane had finally passed and a storm was unleashed upon Smith's Grove Sanitarium. He had foggy recollections of a sister, not the one who had been so derelict in her role as his protector that night but another one, a smaller one, with a soft voice and ribbons in her hair who had only once ever laid eyes upon him once back in his teenage years at the sanitarium.

He had to see her again, to see if she had been saved from that facade of a happy home the way he and the other had been.

He thought nothing of the lives that got in his way. Loomis had inadvertently provided his vehicular escape from the hospital. He'd never as much as played with a toy car during his stay at the hospital let alone learned how to drive one but the evil within had expertly handled the wheel of the hospital car and once on the inner state a rambling drunk had provided a less conspicuous means of transport.

Haddonfield had been asleep in those seventeen years but that night he'd sent it hurtling headlong into a waking nightmare, a grisly reminder of what it was that they should never have forgotten.

He hadn't meant to at first.

But seeing her with her vapid friends and they slipshod way that they regarded their task of taking care of children had brought back memories of the sister whose life he had taken all those years ago. She should have been watching him. This other sister, with a new family and no memory of where she had come, was so similar and yet also miles apart from the other. Michael had seen in her a maternity, a true determination to care for her charges in spite of her youth and inner desire to be more like her two friends. Somehow it had endeared both the evil and the child to her. The child wanted to be with her, to play games of hide and seek to go through a haunted house together on Halloween night.

And so had the evil. Only it had twisted the child's desires into something monstrous. And even then it's singular rage at the girl's friend's disregard for responsibility had made it seek them out, both bearing the face of his dead sister. They'd squirmed in his grasp, desperate to survive but they had been no match for his bloodlust. He'd taken his sister by surprise when he'd driven the knife into her flesh. He was older, stronger and far more driven now. The two young women had been no match. Neither had the young man who Michael had surprised in the kitchen of that dark house. He'd never gotten a chance to make his sister's lover pay for being the reason she never took proper care of him that night. The boy's face was a blur in his memory and as Michael had watched him from the pantry closet all he saw was that here again was a person who had shirked responsibility. The child cried for attention and the evil thirsted for blood. He'd come at the boy like a moving shadow, pinioning him to the wall and driving the blade home in a matter of seconds. So far had his knife been driven that the boy had been pinned to the wall, suspended like a decoration and it had almost been enough to make Michael giggle.

Had he known the good doctor was on his heels he wouldn't have gone through the trouble of luring his sister over to the macabre haunted house he'd set up across the street. But he'd wanted to see her again, to see how she handled herself.

She'd fought him. He had anticipated a struggle but never a fight. She'd been desperate to protect herself and her charges and no matter how many times he got back up she would be there to bring him down again. It had made him angry at the very end. He just wanted her to give up like the rest. Why couldn't she just die? Even when he'd gained the upper hand she'd been rescued from the jaws of death by Loomis who had coldly emptied his pistol into his old patient.

And still that did nothing to stop Michael. Laurie had become his obsession. Never had a path so bloody been carved into a town so normally idyllic. And just when he'd finally gotten his sister trapped, Loomis once more had to play the hero and trap them both in an explosion that should have been the end of both of them.

Perhaps there was a light in Loomis in the way that there was a darkness in Michael that sustained them both in spite of lethal injuries. Michael had allowed himself to dissemble after that night, turning off all senses and letting them think that he was comatose. For a full decade he'd remained shut down, hearing no news of Loomis or Laurie for ten full years. And then once more the ignorance of those in charge of him spelled their doom.

Laurie was dead.

That in and of itself had been enough to rouse both the trapped child and the ever present darkness. As the child cried at the extinction of his family the evil crowed in triumph. He woke that night and killed only those who stood in his way, a mere two security officers and an intern.

After that he'd set out for the wilderness, seeking shelter from anything resembling Haddonfield. The evil was at bay unless anyone stumbled within range of his home and then he would strike out them, once more out of necessity to keep himself secret from the rest of the world although he revelled in the sport of it. They all seemed so

similar to him, these young people who enjoyed abandoning rules and responsibility for the untamed forests. After a while people avoided his neck of the woods like the plague and he was perfectly content to live out the rest of his existence in solitude.

Fate, cruel mistress that it was, had other plans for him in mind. He'd been trekking through the woods of Northern California, hunting for anything that could be killed when he'd heard the loud blaring noise of a radio coming from the nearby dirt road. He'd expected another group of teenagers, ripe for the killing, but instead had watched from the bushes as two men leaned on an old pick up truck drinking beers and talking about a school of some sort that their children had been accepted to. Michael had been all for moving on when something they'd said made him freeze instantly.

"Some folks are sayin' that the headmistress was the one who survived all that shit that happened in Haddonfield all those years back..."

It had just been a rumour. Neither of the men seemed to take much stock in it but the evil within Michael did. It roared back to life, desperate to find out for himself. He had hunted for the truth all that summer, eventually finding himself trailing the nurse that had accompanied Loomis in the night he'd escaped Smith's Grove. Loomis had died several years previously as Michael found out which meant that the nurse was the only one who knew the truth anymore. Michael had taken out her family before finally killing the woman himself and in the process had discovered that Laurie had not died at all.

She'd faked her death only months after Michael's attack on the hospital and had started a new life for herself in California...and had even had a child.

For once the child within him shared the rage of the evil. How dare she lie to him, her only sibling, and start over, keeping him away! They were family and family did not lie! Why couldn't she have had the courage to face him once more?

She had to pay...and so did her son.

Michael had made his way across the country, donning his old mask until he'd reached Laurie's private school in the valley. Her son, a handsome young man, had piqued Michael's interest the second he'd set eyes on the boy. He looked much like his mother and dimly Michael wondered if that was what he had looked like at that age. But the boy, much like his mother's deceased friends, did not adhere to responsibility and the child cried out for him to be punished, not only for disobeying his mother but for being so ungrateful. He knew what she had survived and had the gall to act as though her devotion was a burden.

He had to be taught a lesson. He and his equally juvenile friends. It had been like old times. His stalking in the mountains had been brief and done out of necessity at best. He had not enjoyed such a spree in two decades.

And when once more he was reunited with Laurie he had anticipated her to cower, and this time there was no Dr. Loomis to save her.

She'd surprised him with her own steely resolve. She ran from him but

this time it was out of preservation rather than fear and when she and her son had reached safety she'd done the most unexpected thing of all: she'd marched right back into that school and given him the fight of his life. She could have ended him once and for all but the evil refused to let it's prized vessel die. Michael had crawled away, incapacitated a medical worker and switched clothes with the man, willing to wait to strike Laurie down when the time was right.

For several years he'd waited in anticipation, desperate to hear word of her. From various sources he learned that she'd decapitated the man he'd switched clothes with and had been sent, of all places, to Smith's Grove, for psychiatric care. In all that time Michael hadn't heard anything of her son and presumed the boy to have died. And if he hadn't died...well...Michael would rectify that situation in due time but first he'd determined to see Laurie one last time, a time that had nearly turned into his own end but it was Laurie's turn to make an error. Foolishly she'd believed that somehow his evil had deteriorated and left behind a frightened child. She'd reached for him...and he'd struck, hardly believing his luck when at long last he'd plunged his knife into his sister.

She'd fallen, a look of almost relief on her face and Michael had felt the strangest feeling of disappointment. Not because he'd finally purged his nearly twenty-five year long fixation but because all this time he had somehow expected that with he death would come release from either the darkness or the child in him.

But there was nothing but dull surprise that finally she was gone.

He'd done the only thing he could think to do.

He'd returned to Haddonfield, back to his old home.

To his annoyance he'd found it occupied by a host of young people, none of whom stood out to him the way Laurie had all those years ago. They were nothing more or less than the same idiots who had dared trespass on whatever land he had been occupying when he'd lived in the mountains. Bodies with different faces. It was all in a night's work for him although he thought that, with his family gone, the next time death came for him he would not emerge triumphant. He'd wanted to make his massacre grandiose and he certainly had, but even after his old home lay in ashes he still crawled from the rubble unscathed.

Only this time he wasn't thirsty for vengeance. He did not feel that pull to any of those who had bested him the way he had with Laurie.

He felt oddly tired.

He left Haddonfield that night for Canada, and lived once more in solitude in the mountains. As before he only killed when necessary, which was surprisingly sparse. The people of that country were rather attuned to their surroundings and he only ever caught the really ignorant ones off guard. Once or twice they would fight back and escape but he never lingered long enough to be caught.

Something was happening to him. He couldn't move as he once had. His bones felt heavy, his reflexes slow. Before he could crush a man's

windpipe with as much effort as breaking a tree branch but now he could barely pick up an axe without his muscles giving over to gnawing pain.

The evil had saved him from stab wounds to the neck and eye, more gunshots than he could remember, falls that could kill the most rugged of men and numerous fires and explosions but it seemed the one thing it could not fight back against was mortality.

Michael Myers was getting old and the evil was getting restless. It had no use for an aged vessel.

He woke up that cloudy Canadian October morning slowly and painfully. He hadn't had much activity in recent years and the fact that he awoke sore every morning only furthered his realization that he was no longer anywhere near his prime.

He needed to go home before the years finally claimed him.

Yes, back to Haddonfield where the evil first claimed him, just in time for Halloween.

Back for one last scare.

2. Chapter 2

The familiar sounds of The Monster Mash woke Mickey Morris from his fitful sleep. Instinctively the seventeen year old reached a hand out to his bedside table and hit the off button on the speaker dock, not even flinching when the force of his hand made his iPhone rattle out of the stand and clatter to the floor.

Another night of poor sleeping. It had been going on for almost two weeks now and he was starting to think that it was time to see a doctor, although he didn't think a typical physician would do anything more than prescribe him sleeping pills and given his past medical history he doubted that they'd even give him that.

He lay curled under his blankets, his eyes jammed tightly shut against the autumn sunlight streaming into his room, knowing that at any minute his parents would start hollering for him to get up and ready for school. Unbidden, he felt his blood boil at the very thought. They were allowed to go country clubbing all hours of the night and sleep in until noon but God forbid he was ever late for homeroom. His nostrils flared and his eyebrows tensed at the injustice and not for the first time in his life he wished they would just go away.

Mickey opened his eyes.

No...those kinds of thoughts weren't really right. He put it down to the lack of sleep and typical teenaged angst. His mother and father worked hard to provide for him and Dexter.

Thinking of his baby brother, who was most likely tucked into his high chair at the breakfast table made Mickey smile and served to take the edge off his irateness. No matter how badly he slept or how angry his hormones made him he could always count on his brother's laughing, smiling face to settle him down again. He loved that

kid.

Sighing resignedly, Mickey kicked off his sheets, ran a hand through his shaggy blonde hair and, taking extra care to not step on his iPhone, he headed to the bathroom that adjoined his bedroom. It was things like having his own bathroom that reminded him that no matter how bad things got with his parents he had a lot to be grateful for.

He only showered for five minutes. He had more than an hour before school but he couldn't stand his father's snide jibes if decided to take long showers. And yet it was perfectly fine for them to carry on until three in the morning, making all sorts of melodramatic noises while he tried to sleep, and if he ever mentioned it he got the back of his father's hand. If Mickey wanted to do what all healthy teenaged boys did and take care of business in the shower in his own bathroom he hardly saw how that was anybody's business but his own.

Still, things had been relatively quiet and he wanted to keep it that way for as long as possible. So he took only enough time to wash his hair and scrub himself clean before hopping out of the shower and going to get dressed for the day.

His room was on the second floor of the old house that his family occupied. It was high ceilinged but small, with his bed, computer desk and TV stand all cramped in together. The floor was strewn with his clothes and as Mickey hopped around dressing himself he stooped every few seconds to toss the old articles into the laundry hamper. If his room at least looked clean then he could keep the peace a little while longer.

As he was pulling on a green letterman hoodie he chanced a glance out the window to the houses across the street and blinked in mild surprise at the paper skeletons, plastic ghosts and pumpkin faced orange trash bags bedecking their yards and homes.

Shit.

It was Halloween today and he'd almost forgotten. Hastily he threw open his closet and rummaged through the contents, trying to find the costume he'd purchased. After a moment Mickey halted, an old pair of boxers in his hand. Of course he wouldn't find any costume in here because he'd forgotten to buy one.

To be one of a handful of sober suited students on today of all days was nothing short of numbing. He loved Halloween and cursed himself for having put off costume shopping for so long.

"MICKEY!"

His mother's voice bellowed up the stairs at him and for a moment he tensed in irritation. Why couldn't they ever just leave him be for five minutes? He had never been late for school and this early in the school year he wasn't about to let that happen.

Taking a deep breath to calm himself down Mickey picked up his iPhone and headed down the stairs. As he went he composed a quick text message to Curtis. He and Vanessa had said they would be picking him up this morning and if he convinced them to get him earlier then

maybe he'd have a decent chance of hitting up the party store on the way to school and getting himself at least a passable costume. He hadn't even determined what it was that he would be going as yet.

The kitchen was buzzing with noise when he entered. The TV was on, broadcasting the news. On the shelf the coffee maker was humming as it dripped ochre liquid into his father's travel mug. His mom was sitting at the table, talking animatedly to Dexter who was giggling as he ate his cereal with a plastic spoon that ended in a cartoony triceratops head. As Mickey passed by he ruffled the three year old's scruffy blonde hair which of course only made him giggle all the more.

"Morning squirt," he said, plopping himself into a vacant chair and reaching for a piece of toast from the pile in the middle of the table.

"Mousey!" Dexter said cheerfully.

"When are you going to grow out of that?" His mother sighed with a sigh, sitting back in her chair. Since he'd been able to talk Dexter had only ever called Mickey by that name, unable to make the distinction between his big brother and Mickey Mouse, not that Mickey minded.

"I like it," Mickey said, taking a bite out of the warm toast.

His mother shrugged. "I suppose." She ran a hand through her long, dark blonde hair and readjusted her glasses. She and Mickey's father had married out of high school and had him shortly after and were young compared to the rest of the parents of kids his age.

Perhaps that was why his father was increasingly angry. Spending seventeen years of your life raising a child when everyone else had waited wasn't an easy thing to live with...at least that's what Mickey tried to reason himself to thinking whenever he got the brunt of his father's temper.

The man in question turned from the counter with his travel mug in hand. As usual for a week day he wore a crisp business suit and had combed his russet hair back which, in Mickey's opinion, made him look like a Jimmy Cagney mobster. His father had been an athlete in school and although he'd developed a paunch with age he still had an athlete's build, which was yet another reason Mickey tried hard not to give too much pushback. His old man could probably flatten him if he really wanted to and although Mickey had inherited the height he was too gangly to put up much of a winning fight.

He took a gulp of coffee and said, "He'll learn one day Olivia. One way or the other." The man laughed to himself and took another swig from his mug. Mickey's mother gave a forced, half nervous laugh and in that same instant Mickey felt something angry and dark prickling his insides, something that vowed that if his father so much as looked at Dexter with anything other than parental love then Mickey would gladly slit the man's throat.

Mickey blinked.

It was thoughts like that that made him wonder whether or not his

teen angst had crossed the border into insanity. He quickly shovelled more toast into his mouth and focused his attention on his brother, who was still munching cereal next to him.

Something must have shown on his face when that dark thought had crossed his mind. His father lowered his mug and gave Mickey an all too familiar stare.

"Something you wanna say champ?" He asked, a dangerous edge to his voice. Mickey shook his head, keeping his eyes on the tablecloth. He knew it was best not to challenge the man when he used that tone of voice.

Forcibly his mother tried to cut the tension. "Alan, have you managed to find a baby-sitter for tonight?"

Mickey's father shook his head, his eyes still fixed on his son. Mickey's heart was hammering in his chest and he hastily picked up his phone, hoping that Curtis had gotten back to him so that at least he could have the excuse of being in conversation with his friends to spare him at least some of his father's wrath but there was no reply to his earlier text.

"Well maybe I can get one of the girls to come by," his mother went on, keeping her voice purposefully level. "Not all of them are doing something for Halloween."

"I think our boy has something he'd like to say," Mickey's father said, still with that predator-like gaze.

Fear crept its way up Mickey's back but he knew he still had a shot of getting out of this unscathed. All he had to do was supplicate and his Dad would be appeased.

No, said a quiet voice in his head, _not this time. You haven't done anything wrong_.

He swallowed his piece of toast and gave his father a perfectly innocent look and said, "I wasn't gonna say anything."

"Don't lie to me Mickey," his father said in a low voice. "You were obviously just dying to say something a moment ago."

Why did he always have to press the issue? Mickey took a deep breath and decided to push on. If he acted as though nothing were wrong then maybe it wouldn't be. He pushed himself out of his chair and went to the sink to wash his plate, dangerously close to his father's reach. He said nothing as he turned in the tap, his heart hammering in his chest. If he could just get out the door fast enough he'd be safe. Alan Morris wasn't one to air the family's dirty laundry in public.

"I asked you a question!" His father barked suddenly but Mickey managed to restrain himself from jumping in alarm.

"Alan, really just let him be!" His mother said feebly from the table. "You'll be late!"

"No!" His father said punitively, his arm braced on the counter in front of Mickey who was trapped between his father and the stove.

"Mister Hotshot here clearly thinks he can raise a kid better than us-"

"Jesus Christ I didn't know you were psychic Dad."

The words left his mouth before he could stop them. Time in the kitchen seemed to stand still, even Dexter was watching the scene with wide, green eyes. Mickey's father's face turned an ugly red, his beady eyes narrow. Before Mickey could dodge out of the way the back of the man's hand lashed out, striking him so hard in the face that Mickey staggered backwards into the fridge.

"Mickey!" His mother cried out in dismay at the same time that Dexter started crying. Spots dancing before his eyes Mickey righted himself and stared levelly at his father who stood in front of him, a look of disbelief on his face at what he'd just done.

There was silence between them for a prolonged moment.

"Son..." His father said in a shaky voice, taking a step forward but Mickey didn't want to hear it. His head was still spinning from the blow. At the table his mother was desperately trying to quiet Dexter down. Mickey's hand was going numb and it took him a second to realize why. He'd gripped the edge of the sink when he'd stumbled backwards...or at least he thought he had. Looking down he saw that his fingers were closed tightly around the handle of a long, sharp kitchen knife.

He glanced up at his father who still looked stunned at what he'd once more allowed himself to do and for a microsecond Mickey could distinctly feel what it would be like to close the distance between them and sink the blade repeatedly into the bastard's gut, to hear the slice of metal through flesh and feel the man's warm blood oozing down over his fingers.

His cell phone buzzed. It was a text message from Curtis. His free hand shaking, Mickey pulled it out of his pocket and read the reply message:

Meet us at the Shell? I gotta fuel the baby up before school.

The moment of silence ended. Letting go of the knife, Mickey spun on his heel, grabbed his backpack off of the floor and flung the front door open to the crisp chill of the October morning air.

It was only when he'd reached the bottom step that the crucible of emotions exploded and despite being out in broad daylight Mickey let the tears fall as he walked down the street, his head bowed, not noticing the steadfast stare of a man in faded mechanic's overalls watching him from the other end of the street, his head cocked curiously to one aide.

3. Chapter 3

Haddonfield was the very picture of middle America. Even in the past thirty-five years it hadn't succumbed to the metropolitan boom that had claimed other towns like it. A few new housing developments on the outskirts, a casino in the several multi-storey building business area and a new mall were the only features to suggest that really

anything at all had changed.

But the houses in this section of town were still quaint and homey, all boasting gardens and trees whose leaves were gliding to the earth in a rain of amber, russet and gold.

Mickey didn't notice it or care as he continued down the street. The Shell station was down two blocks and around the corner and although a part of him wished that Curtis and Vanessa had pulled up to his house to get him he was more grateful that he had an opportunity for an early escape, for a chance to calm down. At least this way he had a chance to walk off his anger and frustration.

He managed to get his tears under control in a few minutes and by that point he'd become aware of the throbbing in his face. He prayed to God that he hadn't developed a bruise. The last thing he needed or wanted was for his friends to see more evidence of his father's abusive behaviour

The thing that pissed him off most was that whether it was shouting him down or hitting him Mickey's father always had to act so damn surprised by his own actions, as if he hadn't known what had gotten into him. The first several times it had happened Mickey had completely believed that his old man hadn't meant to lash out with such violence but he knew better. His father used the ignorance as a defence mechanism against himself. In his mind if he played the man who honestly hadn't meant too then he could somehow excuse his behaviour.

It only served to anger him further. The sheer gall that his father had in acting the victim was enough to make Mickey wish he'd used that knife on the bastard when he'd had the chance. Perhaps that was why his father was always so abusive. He'd seen the dark look in his son's eyes that morning when he'd made that little jibe about Dexter. Maybe he was afraid that one day he would finally push his son too far and wanted to keep him as downtrodden as possible in hopes that he could extinguish any fight that Mickey had.

Fat fucking chance, Mickey thought bitterly, keeping his head bowed as he continued to walk down the sidewalk. His father was just making it worse every time he chose to lash out. The fact that Mickey would have probably stabbed the man if Curtis' text hadn't broken through his wrath proved that. And it was this growing, twisted hatred in him that made things worse.

I'm not that kind of person, Mickey told himself. He didn't want to hurt anybody, least of all the way he thought of hurting his father but day by day he could almost feel something in him growing, something malevolent...something evil. Mickey shook at the idea. He wasn't a monster and as far as he was concerned that present darkness was more of an enemy than his father was. He was almost eighteen. Once he reached that age he could find somewhere else to go or at least he would if he weren't so afraid about what would happen to Dexter once he was out of the family home.

He stopped suddenly and frowned. A strange, creeping sensation was working its way up his spine. He felt the unpleasant feeling of somebody watching him and he glanced behind, expecting to see some punk little kid in a costume trying to pull a Halloween prank or even his father come to offer up a pathetic apology. But upon looking

around he saw nothing but the empty, decorated street.

For half a moment he stood there, staring hard at the street. He still felt the feeling that somebody just out of sight had their eyes on him and with another shiver he realized without really knowing how that the person looking at him, wherever they were, did not mean him well.

Tense, he turned and let out a yelp of alarm as he collided with someone who let out a shriek of equal surprise. For half a moment he considered turning tail and running for it in blind panic but the next second he realized who it was that he'd collided.

"You scared the hell out of me Lindsey!" He said, his voice shaky.

At exactly five feet tall and as lithe as a ballerina she didn't exactly cut an intimidating figure at first glance. Perhaps that was why she kept her gun on the outside of her jacket, just in case anybody was under the impression that she could easily be trifled with, those morons who didn't get the hint when they saw the gold star on her chest. Many of the kids Mickey's age who had ended up on the wrong side of the law at one point or another had only once to be on the receiving end of Lindsey's brand of justice to know that she was not someone to be taken lightly.

"Sheriff Wallace," she corrected him. She was forty now although could have passed for thirty and not just because of her size. She was quite beautiful, with long dark brown hair that she'd tied into a ponytail today and soulful brown eyes that right now were fixed on him with a look of motherly concern that by this point in his life he was all too used to seeing. "What happened?" She asked.

"Nothing," Mickey said, looking back over his shoulder at the perfectly normal street behind him. "Guess I just thought the boogeyman was after me."

Lindsey blinked, a haunted look passing over her face for the briefest of moments. "That explains the head on collision," she said. "Now do you wanna tell me why one side of your face is black and blue?"

Mickey blinked in surprised and unconsciously raised a hand to his face, hissing when he felt the sting over and around his eye. Terrific. Now he had a shiner to show everyone at school...again.

"It's nothing," he told Sheriff Wallace lamely, knowing full well that she wouldn't be fooled for a second.

"Bullshit," she said sharply.

"Really Sheriff-"

"Mickey if I had a goddamn nickel for every time I saw you like this I'd have been able to retire last year."

"Just...just leave it okay?" He said and tried to push past her but she grabbed his arm with surprising strength and stopped him.

"And what if I don't?" She said, pinning him with a hard stare. "Jesus Mickey I'm surprised he hasn't given you a concussion yet." He'd never actually told her who it was, at first passing it off on bullying but if Lindsey Wallace was anything it was perceptive. She'd doubted that Mickey had been victimized due to the friends he kept, which was only too true. That had been three years ago and she'd had the grace not to push things too far but she'd always kept a close watch on him, his mother and Dexter.

"What are you even doing out here without your precious squad car?" He asked her as a way of avoiding the elephant in the room.

"It's Halloween," she told him.

"I hadn't noticed."

Sheriff Wallace's eyes twinkled with humour but she kept a determined straight face. "Don't get cute. I just want to make sure things stay quiet."

"It's not even dark yet!"

"Yeah well the creeps don't just come out at night anymore. You're too young to know."

Mickey rolled his eyes. For as long as he could remember he and everyone else in Haddonfield under the age of twenty had constantly been reminded that Halloween had a particularly bloody history in their town. Only twelve years ago an old house had collapsed in a fire while a reality internet show was being filmed within. People had said that Michael Myers had massacred several people live on air but all that the police had found was a collapsed building with several dead college kids underneath in the rubble.

That didn't mean that there still weren't things to look out for. The more delinquent kids in the neighbourhood just loved egging, toilet papering and stealing trick or treater's candy. Really that was all they could do now. Years before there had been a law passed making it punishable by law to dress up as Michael Myers any day of the year and seeing as how it was something of a rite of passage for the punks to don the costume every Halloween their nighttime hijinks had been limited in recent years.

Lindsey let go of him, peering up at him, the look of worry back.

"I know you don't like it," she said in a low voice, "but it's my job to make sure people in this town are safe, outside their homes and inside." Her gaze hardened as she went on, "but I've been seeing this go on too long Mickey. I'm sorry but if I see this again," she gestured at his black eye, "I'm stepping in and calling social services."

Mickey stared at his shoes. He knew that it would be the right thing to do. Knew that it would save not only him and Dexter but also his mother. But what if social services didn't do anything? What if the knowledge that Mickey had told someone only made his father lash out with even further violence? And besides, there was no way of knowing what would happen if social services intervened...

"They'll take him away," he said softly, thinking of his baby

brother's chubby, smiling face.

"They won't," Lindsey assured him. "The system doesn't work that way all the time."

Mickey met her eyes and saw that she wasn't lying.

"I've gotta get going," he said. "Look just...wait okay? I don't wanna shake anything up with him anymore right now and if he gets angrier it'll only make things worse."

"I can handle worse," Lindsey said. "Like you wouldn't believe."

Mickey gave her half a smile and moved on, not looking back, not even when he felt that familiar creeping sensation return.

4. Chapter 4

At the end of the street Mickey took the left turn and walked across the intersection to the gas station. He could see Curtis' dark green convertible parked at one of the vacant lanes. Vanessa was sitting in the passenger seat, her arm dangling over the edge of the window, bobbing her head in time to music on the radio.

Before he approached the car, Mickey threw the hood of his hoodie up. He didn't know the extent of his bruising and took the chance that the shadow cast by the hood would be enough to hide it. Then he strode forward and gave a gentle tug on Vanessa's dangling hand. She looked around and smiled. Usually she wore her blonde hair long but today she'd tied it up into two long pigtails.

Vanessa was a knockout, with a supermodel face and a body from a magazine. She never wore makeup though which was why Mickey was slightly surprised to find that her face had been powdered starch white, her eyes heavily shadowed and dark blue veins lined onto her face and neck.

"You look alive," he said with a grin as he slid into the seat behind her.

Vanessa giggled. "I'm a zombie cheerleader." She tugged on the front of the tank top she wore which had been slashed at various parts and caked with fake blood.

"Is that your actual uniform?" Mickey asked. He'd seen her in it time and time again and knew the second he saw the big HHS letters in the front that it was. "Kellerman's gonna kill you!" He shook his head but smiled, thinking of the grey haired, strict cheerleading coach who could barely tolerate smudges of dirt on the uniforms of her squad.

Vanessa rolled her pretty blue eyes. "Chain smoking is going to kill her first." Her nostrils flared angrily as she added, "And if she blows more smoke in my face again I'll kill her!"

"Are you sure you're allowed to get away with that?" Mickey asked, glancing once more at Vanessa's uniform. She'd gone to town on it and he could just picture the look of horror on Ms. Kellerman's face when

she caught sight of it.

Vanessa shrugged. "I've got a spare. Besides it was better than my first choice. I was going to go as a sexy Mother Theresa."

"They actually make those?"

"They do if you use your imagination," She gave him a dazzling smile and Mickey laughed. This was where he liked to be, among the people who made his life a million times better.

Curtis came out of the station a second later. Mickey laughed when he saw the costume his friend wore because it fit him to a tee. It was a gladiator costume, fake leather with two straps that pinned over his shoulders, showing off his well defined arm muscles. Curtis' broad torso swelled against the dark material of the chest piece. He grinned when he saw Mickey in the back seat and Mickey grinned right back, looking right into his big brown eyes.

"Nice skirt," he said.

Curtis glowered at him. "It's not a skirt."

"Looks like a skirt to me."

"Nessa will you please tell him it's not a skirt!" Curtis said as he slid into the driver's seat. Vanessa glanced down and said, "Sorry baby but it looks like a skirt to me. I mean I don't think they actually have a name for gladiator clothes so..."

"So it's a skirt," Mickey said with a triumphant grin.

"Fuck you," Curtis said with a smile before pulling the car out of the gas station. He glanced into the rearview mirror and added, "My letters look good on you Mickey."

Mickey smiled softly and looked out the side of the car, watching the town pass by and relishing in the feeling of the crisp morning air blowing through his hair.

He'd never forget the day that Curtis had given him his letterman sweater. It had been back in tenth grade after Curtis had lettered in football. For the longest time Mickey had done his damndest to keep the turmoil at home a secret, trying hard to make all of his closet friends believe that things were perfectly fine but somehow, like Sheriff Wallace, they hadn't been fooled.

He'd freaked when Curtis had confronted him but the other boy had stood his ground and given him the hoodie. That of course had only served to send Mickey into a fully blown breakdown. He'd cried like a baby, telling Curtis that it wasn't right and that Vanessa deserved the jacket.

But Curtis hadn't intended to give it to his girlfriend at all. He'd wanted Mickey to wear it all along. Curtis amazed him in the best ways all the time. He had all those years ago in ninth grade when Mickey had admitted to having a crush on him and Curtis, instead of exploding in anger, had been flattered, admitted that he really didn't think he rolled that way and taken Mickey into his own group, who were now, along with Dexter, the most important people in

Mickey's life.

As they drove down the street, Mickey listened comfortably as Curtis and Vanessa told him about how hard it had been to go costume shopping on such short notice. He decided not to mention the fact that he had 't purchased a costume until they were at school. They had a pass period after lunch. They could go to the party store then.

"By the way," Vanessa said, digging around in her backpack, "I checked over your physics homework and you could not have been more wrong if you tried."

Mickey groaned, taking his papers back from her.

"I don't understand it," she went on, "you're totally great at English and shit but you choke on the easy stuff."

"Easy for you," he said glumly, glancing down at the numerous corrections Vanessa had pointed out in red pen.

"Physics is so easy!" She insisted.

"You're a lateral thinker," Mickey told her. "I'm not. I can't help it if shit like this," he shook the papers for emphasis, "is about as much fun as watching cheese age."

"Don't take it so hard," Curtis said with a reassuring smile. "Miss Lollipop Chainsaw here failed the English essay."

"You weren't supposed to tell!" Vanessa said with a pout.

Mickey shook his head in disbelief. "Jesus Nessa I spent like four hours helping you with that thing!"

"I don't have the imagination for English," Vanessa insisted.

"But you've got enough to put your uniform through a meat grinder," Mickey shot back with a smile.

They had just pulled up to the intersection that lead to the main road the students used to go to the high school. The light turned green and Curtis had started to pull into the middle of the street when out of nowhere a rusty old pick up truck passed by them at high speed, cutting in front of the SuperBee and barely avoiding clipping the front end. Curtis slammed on the breaks and blared on the horn, glaring at the driver as Vanessa swore angrily.

"What the fuck?!" Curtis yelled as the car continued down the street. "Watch where the hell you're going psycho!" He roared at the driver. The truck screeched to a halt down the road, staying perfectly still for a lingering moment.

Mickey stared furtively at the truck, wondering and also fearing what the driver would do next. The truck was old but powerfully built, rusting at the edges and caked with dirt. The license plate was from out of state and as Mickey looked closer he saw that it was out of country, from Canada. Obviously the son of a bitch didn't know how to drive south of the border.

He couldn't see the driver this far away but got the sense that he was watching them just as intently as they were watching him.

A horn behind them sounded.

"Come on," Vanessa said. "We're holding up traffic."

Curtis moved on, glaring at the road ahead of him. Mickey turned around in his seat. The truck had also moved on, heading down the other street and out of sight.

"I thought Canadians were supposed to be nice," Mickey remarked, turning back around.

"They are," Curtis grumbled. "But they're shit drivers when they come down here apparently. We're probably too aggressive for them."

"Well I didn't get his plates. Did you guys bother?"

Vanessa shook her head. "I was too busy trying to not die of a heart attack."

They drove on, all three showering abuse on the reckless driver of the pick up truck. As they pulled into Haddonfield High School's spacious student parking lot Vanessa turned in her seat.

"Holy shit!" She gasped and Curtis, looking around, suddenly looked furious.

"What is it?" Mickey asked, looking around in panic, expecting to see the pick up come careening into the parking lot behind them. "Is that guy back?"

Vanessa just stared at him blankly while in the driver's seat Curtis was holding the wheel in a white knuckle grip.

"What is it?!" Mickey hissed, losing his patience now.

"Oh sweetie," Vanessa said softly, "your face..."

The blood froze in Mickey's veins. Automatically he touched the top of his head only to find that the hood had flopped off, most likely when Curtis had braked back at the intersection. He looked balefully at Vanessa, not knowing quite what to say. Then without warning Curtis, who had sat in stony silence since seeing the bruises on Mickey's face, turned the key in the ignition, gunning the engine and backing up without warning.

"Curt!" Mickey yelled, flung back into his seat from the force.

"I'll fucking kill him," Curtis said through gritted teeth as he spun the car around, ignoring Vanessa who was gripping her seat to avoid tumbling out of the car. "I'll kill him myself!"

"No!" Mickey said in a voice just under a shout. He flung himself forward and put a hand on Curtis' exposed shoulder. "Curt please just don't make it worse than it already is!" Curtis stopped, took a deep, steadying breath and silently drove the car back into the lot. He climbed out of the front seat and Mickey was prepared to open his

door but before he could Curtis put his hands on the outside and pinned him with an intense stare that made Mickey shrink back into the vinyl seats.

"Next time I see him," he said in a dangerously low voice, "I'm knocking his teeth in."

"Don't," Mickey said in a small, defeated voice.

"I wasn't asking your permission," said Curtis.

"Please," Mickey pleaded, "I can handle this okay. Most of the time. But if you guys got involved and he did something to you..." He swallowed as a lump came to his throat but he felt no sorrow, only rage. His friends, especially Curtis, were in the same category of things his father would not hurt unless he wanted a knife in his throat.

Curtis didn't move for a moment, his eyes still blazing. Then he spun on his heel and stormed away in the direction of the cafeteria side entrance.

Mickey sat there feeling miserable. Out of everything that had happened that morning upsetting Curtis was the one thing that he couldn't handle. He knew that they were all right, and that his father needed to finally be punished for his actions, but still the idea of something happening to Dexter without him was too much.

Vanessa turned around in the passenger seat and gave him an encouraging smile.

"He's just worried about you sweetie," she said gently.

"I know," Mickey replied with a sigh, staring at Curtis' rapidly retreating form. "I guess that just makes it worse. I don't mean to piss him off-"

"He cares a lot about you," Vanessa cut in. "You've got no fucking idea Mick. And honestly if I see your father after this I'm not so sure I'll be able to stop myself from ripping his nuts off."

"And you'd do it too wouldn't you?"

"Totally," Vanessa said with a wicked grin. "Want some concealer for that thing?"

Mickey chuckled. "Yes Nessa I would love some concealer."

From the sidewalk Michael watched the girl shuffle forward in the seat of the car to help the boy.

The trip from Canada had been easy, almost a complete flashback to the day he'd killed the man for his car and mechanic's clothes after escaping Smith's Grove. He'd overpowered a grizzled driver in Niagara Falls and from there had taken every backroad and forest path possible through the border. Instinct had told him the way back to Haddonfield and he'd been pleasantly surprised to find that even after all the advancement of the past twelve years the town remained the same.

He hadn't known who it was that he was looking for. He'd driven around town in the dark hours before dawn, passing by where his old home had once stood. Now there was nothing there but a patch of grass. Obviously the townspeople had been superstitious enough to believe that building property on that land would spell bad luck.

Driving further through the suburbs had taken him passed that house, the big one with the sloping lawn where he'd met his sister all those years ago. It hadn't changed at all and he'd almost laughed at the fact that there was now a family living there, as if nothing at all had ever taken place.

They'd forgotten him, in the twelve short years that he'd been gone they'd completely forgotten about him.

When the sun had risen, he'd decided to set out on foot in hoping to find someone that would pique the evil's interest. That early in the morning there had only been adults setting out for work and although Michael had watched them in hopes that one of them would prove of interest none of them had. He'd walked through half of the suburbs before he'd felt something, like a tremor through the air, something dark, something simultaneously strong and faint and...familiar, like a long lost family member.

He'd waited outside of the house, curious to see who it was that eluded such a feeling, expecting some pretty young girl to come outside.

He'd been shocked to see the boy, tall but thin as a whip with shaggy honey colored hair and green eyes, eyes that had been filled with tears and something else, something Michael could recognize. Standing behind a tall shrub in a neighbouring yard he'd watched the boy walk down the street, still as a statue, intrigued by the underlying darkness he could feel. He'd never in his life had any kind of extrasensory powers but even now as he watched the boy alight from the car with his friend he could still feel it like a pulse, like a beacon that thrummed just underneath the surface, a contrast to the child in Michael buried underneath all the evil.

He cocked his head to the side.

Yes...this was the one, the one that the evil had driven him here for. The only question was whether or not it wanted him dead or alive.

5. Chapter 5

Lindsey Wallace had never forgotten that Halloween night thirty-five years ago when she had seen the Boogeyman at Laurie Strode's house. She'd been six years old and had never been more terrified in her entire life. The fact that Annie Brackett had been murdered only minutes after she'd left Lindsey in Laurie's care had only driven the horror of that night home. She'd never forgotten that bone white mask with the gaping, empty eyes or the way she and Tommy Doyle had run screaming from Tommy's house, shattering the quiet of the night.

Monster.

That was the only word she could put to the masked face until she'd become old enough to understand truly just what, or rather who it was that had shattered Haddonfield's peace that night. Her parents, grateful that she'd escaped with only the odd nightmare or two, had done their best to keep the knowledge of exactly what it was that had happened that night, not only to her favourite babysitter, but to the rest of the town, secret from her but by the time she'd turned twelve she'd heard it all.

And she'd hated not only Michael Myers but also Annie for it. The girl hadn't made it a secret that she had considered taking care of Lindsey a burden but the fact that she'd been preparing to sneak off with her boyfriend when she'd been killed had made bitterness rise up in Lindsey and it had only grown the older she'd gotten. But along with her smashed idealism of just who Annie Brackett had been came a fierce, glowing respect for Laurie Strode. Laurie had done everything in her power to keep her and Tommy safe and had barely escaped with her life.

As she'd moved into her teens Laurie had become Lindsey's own personal role model. Even though she'd only seen the woman once more after the night Lindsey had determined by the time graduation hit that she was going to emulate Laurie's strength. Even though that old man had come to save her Laurie had still held her own against Michael. She hadn't gone blindly running to a man to keep her safe.

Lindsey had shirked marriage, moved to Chicago and joined the police force but after almost twenty years there she'd been too overwhelmed by the big city crimes to continue on. It had been years since Leigh Brackett had moved to Boca Raton and Haddonfield hadn't seen a good sheriff in all that time. The Dangertainment incident as it had been known was prime example of that. When Lindsey had stepped in a lot of eyebrows had been raised but she put them all back in their place, a fierce determination to not only do Leigh proud but to live on as the new Laurie Strode.

Now, as she walked briskly down the sidewalk of Orange Grove Avenue her mind was clouded with what to do about Mickey Morris. She'd handled a lot in the last twelve years and given that Haddonfield was small and relatively harmless the second she saw injustice she felt a strong urge to put a stop to it and if there was one thing she could not and would not abide it was a parent abusing their child.

That had, as she'd learned through idle curious research, been the whole reason Michael Myers had turned into a murderous psychopath. Through old records and conversations with the older citizens she'd learned that the Myers home had been a tidal wave of abuse before Judith had been murdered.

Mickey, she knew, would not become like that at all but that didn't mean that she was going to stand for this kind of thing.

As she walked down the street, nodding hellos at the people who recognized her Lindsey mulled over what it was that she would do about Alan Morris. She'd seen enough cases of domestic abuse to know that Mickey's fears of the violence escalating if his father was investigated were completely justified but still it would be a cold

day in hell before Lindsey just walked away from this kind of thing.

Sighing she decided to head back to the station for the time being. Just because the terror of Michael Myers had finally ended didn't mean that Haddonfield wasn't impervious to rowdy teens making the night a less than safe place to exist. Mickey had a pass period after lunch, that much she knew. She could try and talk him around again then.

As she walked across a cross walk back to where her squad car was parked at a diner her eye caught a rusty old pick up parked some way down the street. The back was to her, showing Canadian license plates.

Lindsey shook her head in astonishment. Haddonfield wasn't a place for tourists but then again the town was also infamous for out of towners crawling in and irrevocably changing things. More for her own peace of mind she reached into her pocket, fished out a pad of paper and pen and wrote the plate number down. It was only a precaution really and she almost felt foolish doing it.

She reached her car and had just put her hand on the handle when a creeping feeling worked it's way up her spine. Instinctively Lindsey looked into the side-view mirror and felt her heart skip a beat. Reflected in the mirror was a tall man in mechanic's overalls wearing a white mask with black, empty eyes.

Irritation replaced the microsecond of fear and she turned around and glared at the man, who started and tried to run away. Grimacing, Lindsey reached into her belt, pulled out the long range taser and fired, smirking when it connected with the man's calf. She squeezed the trigger for a microsecond, enough to send a jolt of electricity through her query. The man fell over and let out a shriek of pain and at the same moment a group of teens burst from behind a parked minivan and took off down the street, laughing and hollering as they went. For good measure Lindsey sent one smaller shock through the costumed individual as she came up to where he lay and crouched down beside him, keeping her finger over the trigger.

"Not very funny when you get caught is it asshole?" She said with a sigh. The tasered person only whimpered in response. Tossing her ponytail over her shoulder Lindsey reached out and peeled the mask off, narrowing her eyes at the pallid, badly shaven pock marked face of the young man underneath.

"Brent Elamb," she said with a tired sigh. "Christ are all your father's kids just born with disregard for the law?"

"M-m'sorry Sheriff Wallace!" Brent wailed in his nasal voice. "Th-they were gonna let me into the crew if I scared ya just a little bit."

"I don't give a rat's hairy ass what they were going to do," Lindsey said as she pulled the stub of the taser out of the kid's leg and unhooked a set of cuffs from her belt. "You're fucking old enough to know the kind of thing that dressing in that costume gets you slapped with in this town."

"Aww Sheriff please don't take me in my dad'll kill me!"

Lindsey rolled her eyes as she jerked Brent to his feet. She felt stupid for having been so startled at first glancing him in the mirror. Michael Myers had been a giant compared to this punk.

"Your father is not going to kill you," Lindsey said as she forced Brent towards her car, grimacing as he wobbled on limbs still shaky from the tasing. "He actually values contributing to society in however small a way he can." Frankly she'd been surprised that Lonnie Elamb had even made it passed the sixth grade but even though the man was a notorious meat and potatoes parent he worked his ass off to provide for his three sons.

"Y'know," Lindsey said as she unceremoniously stuffed Brent into the backseat of the cruiser, "when I busted your brother for narcotics a few years ago I got the judge to go easy on him because I knew your Dad couldn't afford the bail but you're not gonna be so lucky Brent." She smiled a sugar sweet smile down at him. "But you won't have to worry about losing money for this kiddo."

Brent smiled up at her weakly.

"R-really?"

"Really. Because as you should know by now punishment for Michael Myers impersonation is anywhere from three to eighteen months in minimum security." And with that she slammed the door shut and hopped into the driver's seat, feeling vindicated by the ashen pallor that had come into the kid's face. He was silent for the brief drive down to the station.

The police station had grown out of necessity and as Lindsey walked in that morning, leading the silent and dogged Brent it was filled with the clicking of keyboards, the ring of telephones and the buzz from dispatch. The officers who saw her with Brent gave her knowing nods. It had been a while since a Myers impersonator had been brought in but what with his overalls it wasn't hard to tell. Lindsey hauled Brent into her office, pushing him into a chair and flounced into her own chair behind her desk.

She grimaced when she saw that the kid was actually crying.

"Ah geez," she muttered under her breath. On the drive over she'd already decided to go easy on the kid, although she was by no means letting him get off scott free. "You're an asshole Brent," Lindsey told him bluntly. He nodded glumly in reply. "There's a good goddamn reason we go so hard on people who decide to go parading around on that costume here. And to go doing that to me," she sighed dramatically. Brent looked up at her, bemused and she met his look with surprise. "Didn't you know?" She said in mock shock. "I'd have thought your Dad would have told you."

"T-told me what Sheriff?" He stammered.

"I was there that night Brent," Lindsey said, leaning forward in her chair and fixing him with a pinning stare. "He killed my babysitter. Annie Brackett. And then he came after Laurie Strode while she was watching me and a little boy. Do you have any fucking idea how terrifying it is to have some psycho in that kind of mask come at you with a twelve inch long kitchen knife? And I was only six years

old."

"N-n-no I don't," Brent said, his voice a full octave higher, shivering at the implication of Lindsey's story.

"It's because of Laurie Strode that I wanted to become sheriff," Lindsey went on, sinking back into the comfortable leather of her chair. "She protected me and that boy that night and didn't give a damn about her own safety. I know you and the rest of the punks around here don't think it's a big deal but when some people see that mask it doesn't just scare them. It reminds them of that night. Thirteen fucking people Brent, some of them your age. Think about it for once."

Brent shook again and a small moan escaped his lips.

Lindsey sighed. She'd wanted to scare him and judging from his reaction she'd more than accomplished that.

"Look Brent," she said with a sigh, "I'm not locking you up."

He looked up at her, a glimmer of hope in his eyes.

"Oh you're still gonna pay," she went on. "Out of your own wallet since I know you've been bagging groceries after school. But I'm not throwing you in jail. But if I get wind that you've so much as jay-walked you'll be behind bars so fast it'll make your grandchildren dizzy."

Brent gave her a weak smile. "Thanks Sheriff," he said quietly.

"Get the hell out of here," she said, gesturing to the door. "Are you wearing anything under that costume?"

"Uh...yeah...of course."

"You'll be leaving it here." As she spoke Lindsey mentally kicked herself for having left the mask laying in the parking lot. It wasn't too much of a setback. She could send one of the rookies to pick it up.

Brent struggled out of the overalls, gave her an awkward smile and nod and all but ran out of her office. Lindsey watched him go, shaking her head. Somehow she couldn't help but feel that in spite of her warnings she'd be hauling another Elamb boy in in next to no time.

She had one of the rookies paged to go back to the parking lot of the diner to pick up the mask and then busied herself with paper work. It was only ten in the morning so she had plenty of time before she could go to the high school and talk to Mickey again.

As she was filling out the fining information necessary to rack up Brent's punishment the phone rang.

"Wallace," she said when she answered.

"Hey boss." It was Sara, the rookie she'd sent out to the parking lot. "Are you sure you didn't take that mask with you?"

Lindsey rolled her eyes. "I'm pretty positive," she replied curtly.

"Well there's nothing here," Sara said. "We've combed the whole lot and the sidewalk and bushes and there's just nothing."

"Ah shit," Lindsey cursed. "One of Brent's little gang must have come back for it."

"What should we do?"

"Just keep an extra eye out for anyone wearing a Myers mask tonight," she said. "We should double the highway patrol just in case. We're still takin care of the bill for that stupid bonfire Richie Castle's kids had out on Riddle's Farm last year."

"Roger," Sara replied before signing off.

Shaking her head Lindsey pushed her stack of papers away and got to her feet. She'd take another look at the parking lot and for extra measure go to the Elmab house to make sure one of Brent's brothers hadn't decided to purloin the mask.

As she was walking through the station she bumped into one of the lieutenant's who was examining a sheet of paper with a furrowed brow.

"Oh shit I'm sorry sheriff!" He said when he almost collided with her. Lindsey gave him a reassuring grin and said, "Don't worry about it Keith. We both survived with minimal damage. Where's the fire?" She asked, nodding at the paper.

Keith shrugged. "Nothing. Just something dispatch picked up down from Ontario."

"Canada? That's a bit outside our jurisdiction."

"Yeah but it's a bit serious. They found some old timer dead on the side of the highway. The guy's car was jacked and everything and the state police in Indiana got a tip that a pick up with matching license plates was spotted on the highway at like three in the morning so I was just checking in but nobody's seen anything."

Lindsey froze, her eyebrows furrowed. Slowly she reached into the pocket of her jacket and pulled out the notepad.

"What's the plates?" She asked, surprised by how low her voice sounded.

Keith consulted his papers.

"H19 078. Why what's-Lindsey?" Keith blinked in surprise as Lindsey darted out of the office, her dark ponytail dancing behind her, crumpling the piece of note paper in her hand as she went, her heart hammering a mile a minute.

Curtis couldn't stay mad forever. After having makeup liberally applied to his black eye by Vanessa's skillful hand Mickey wasted no time in hunting for the other boy, Vanessa trailing behind him at a serene pace, grinning like a Cheshire cat when the handful of students who were at school early caught sight of her costume.

They found him a half an hour before the first bell rang, sitting stonily in the library and staring out the window. Mickey glanced at Vanessa just to make sure that it was safe to approach and when she gave the signal they both quietly sat next to him, not speaking for a moment.

"Gym's closed," he said softly, still staring out the window. "I forgot they were setting up for tonight." Mickey knew that Curtis had headed to the gym first to blow off some steam shooting hoops or just running laps. Exercise was his immediate choice of stress relief when Vanessa wasn't around to calm him down but the library, quiet and safe as it was, would have been the next best thing. He knew that the other boy took more of a solace in peace and quiet than he let the rest of the world know.

"We still going?" Vanessa asked him by way of conversation, referring to that night's Halloween dance.

Curtis chuckled and said, "You were talking my ear off about it all night so of course we're going."

"Then how'd you forget that the gym was closed?" Vanessa remarked with a teasing grin. Curtis turned his head to Mickey who felt his face turn red and looked hastily at his shoes.

"I guess I wasn't thinking straight," he said softly.

Mickey rubbed his eyes in frustration and winced when the act of doing made his bruise burn. Both Curtis and Vanessa looked over at him with concern but he shook his head. He'd been the centre of attention for the whole morning and it was starting to get annoying. "M'fine," he mumbled, then cast wildly around for a change of subject. His eyes fell on a gaudy orange and black poster advertising the school's charity drive for that day. "So uh...anyone buying a candy-gram for me today?"

Before either Curtis or Vanessa could answer a chipper voice from behind them answered. "I will but only if you tell me how drop dead beautiful I look today."

They all looked over and saw a short, spectacled girl with long carrot red hair come bobbing up to where they'd gathered, a tall, stocky young man wearing a long white lab-coat with a wild white wig accompanying her.

"Uh...nice costume there Laney," Vanessa commented, the corners of her mouth twitching. Laney only grinned and plopped herself onto her boyfriend Pierce's lap the second he'd sunk into a free chair. She had on short white dress with fake down on the hem and a pair of wings on her back, a feather halo headband secured in her flaming locks. Mickey couldn't believe that she'd even been allowed to enter the school because the costume violated just about every dress code protocol he could think of.

"Are those part of the costume?" Curtis asked, nodding at Laney's chest.

"It's a push up," Laney explained.

"Extra push," Mickey remarked. Laney was normally close to the flat chested area and yet due to the costume's support she now had an impressive bust, although nowhere close to Vanessa's shapely chest.

"I like it," Pierce said, frowning as he readjusted his wild wig, which had toppled off his head as he'd sat down, showing off his smooth, brown shaven head.

"You're supposed to," said Vanessa. "She is your girlfriend."

"And don't any of you kids forget it," Pierce replied, giving Laney a quick peck on the lips. Then, glancing at Curtis he said, "Nice skirt man."

"It is not a fucking skirt!" Curtis stormed, his face flushing again. "Jesus Christ I thought you of all people would appreciate that!"

"Hey just because I'm honor roll doesn't mean I know every detail about historical fashion." He glanced at Vanessa. "I figured you'd know."

"I totally do," she confessed, "but it's kinda fun to let my baby take the heat for the day."

Curtis gaped at Vanessa who only gave him an impish grin in response. Mickey laughed, leaning back in his seat, grateful that the tension of the morning had eased. His best friends were his biggest area of release from the hell of his home life and he appreciated every moment that they weren't focusing their attention on him and his father.

The moment only lasted for a few seconds.

Laney peered closely at him and said, "Uh Mickey...why are you wearing make-up?"

"Duh it's Halloween," Mickey replied without missing a beat but his face burned and the extra rush of blood only served to make his eye sting. He wasn't an authority on make-up but he'd trusted Vanessa's judgement, although given the fact she barely wore any herself he realized at that moment that putting her in charge of cleaning his face up had been a bad call.

"You're a cover girl then?" Pierce asked.

"More like a battered wife!" Laney said, clearly not being able to help herself. Her eyes widened the second she said the words and everyone in the group froze, none of them looking at Mickey, who wished very much that the chair would come to life and swallow him whole. Curtis' face clouded over and after a prolonged, tense second he got to his feet and marched away, his eyes stormy.

There was silence among the group for several moments, punctuated

only by the general buzz of the school around them.

"Well," Mickey said after clearing his throat, "he obviously hates me."

"He totally does not hate you!" Vanessa insisted as the early bell rang. "And you know that. He's just...very...very frustrated. You know Curt's a ride or die guy Mickey."

"Yeah," Pierce put in, running a large hand over Laney's exposed leg to try and soothe her. "He just doesn't get why you're not cool with letting him rip your old man's head off."

Because I want the chance to do that first, Mickey thought bitterly. Aloud he said, "I really don't want any of you behind bars and my old man's got enough clout to make it happen if any of you tried." Although he knew that if it ever came to that Sheriff Wallace would probably be more than happy to look the other way.

Vanessa sighed and got to her feet, flinging her book bag over her shoulder. "Give him until lunch," she said encouragingly. "He'll cool off by then. I've gotta get to practice." She grinned and added, "I wanna see Kellerman totally have an aneurysm when she sees my costume." She waved them goodbye and headed out of the library.

Mickey, Pierce and Laney sat there for several moments, pointedly talking about other subjects. They had several minutes before the bell for homeroom sounded and Mickey had just pulled the homework Vanessa had checked over for him when Laney muttered, "Here comes crazy," under her breath and slid as fast as she could off of Pierce's lap and scurried into the chair that Vanessa had recently occupied.

Glancing back Mickey felt his heart sink equally. Coming towards them through the cluster of students who were leaving the library was a short, stocky middle aged man with thinning light brown hair tied back in a ponytail. As usual he had shaved only as much as to leave a pepper of stubble behind and he was dressed in knee length khaki's that exposed prickly legs. His white button up shirt, stained with paint smudges as though he wanted to tell the world at large without words that he was an artist, was open as usual, revealing an old Duran Duran t-shirt underneath.

"Mr. Morris," he said pleasantly to Mickey, "Mr. Matheson...Miss ," his gaze lingered on Laney, who pointedly crossed her arms over her chest and managed to elegantly drape one leg over the other in a show of class. The gaze hadn't gone un-noticed by Pierce who glared at the man, not even caring that his wig had fallen from his head again.

Really not in the mood to be subjected to anymore drama that morning Mickey looked pleasantly back at the art teacher and said in an equally conversational tone of voice, "Geez Mr. Doyle why can't you ever just call us by our actual names?"

"That wouldn't be appropriate," Mr. Doyle replied. "Students and teachers are supposed to be partners in learning, not friends."

Pierce snorted and said, "Same diff there Mr. Doyle. If we're partners we should have a right to call you Tommy."

"Like I said," Mr. Doyle replied, "not appropriate. Why aren't Mr. Wryst and Miss Penner with you guys?"

"Uh maybe because they're involved in extracurriculars," Mickey said. Contrary to what he said, Mr. Doyle had the often annoying and sometimes funny habit of trying to be his students' buddy. Despite being over forty he never really seemed to want to be his actual age, which, as far as Mickey was concerned, explained why he dressed like a homeless Van Gogh.

"You'd better hustle if you wanna make homeroom," he said, but his typical languid voice made it sound as though he could care less if they were tardy or not. "Principal Winters mentioned banning anyone who steps out of line from the dance tonight." And with that he ambled off, looking for all the world like a stoner on a good trip.

Mickey and his friends watched him go and, when he was safely out of earshot they broke into a fit of laughter, pushing themselves out of their seats and getting their things together.

"Twenty bucks says he talks about that fucking comic book again," Pierce said, holding his hand out for Laney who took it and graciously allowed him to pull her out of her chair.

"Every Halloween, like clockwork," Mickey said with a shake of his head. "And it's graphic novel, not comic book," he reminded Pierce, rolling his eyes. Since he'd started teaching art five years ago, allegedly after the comic industry gave him up for dead, Tommy Doyle had not let an October 31st go by wherein he did not remind his students that he was a survivor of the original Michael Myers massacre and that he had transformed the trauma of that night into a graphic novel that had been incredibly popular...in the mid-nineties. Mickey himself found the whole thing overblown and just a little bit disrespectful. Mr. Doyle's comic had been a continuation of Michael Myers' life that had picked up ten years after the first massacre and had involved, among other things, some freaky cult that had cursed him to be some kind of whacked unbeatable entity that had to kill his whole family before the curse could lift. Mr. Doyle had even had the balls to make himself the hero of the final chapter, albeit far more attractive than he had been at that age.

"It wasn't that bad," Laney conceded as they headed through the bustling hallways as the bell for homeroom sounded. "I mean...until the final chapter...issue...whatever." She shuddered and added, "I mean I can give him credit on account of love and shit for like naming and basing characters on his daughter and wife-"

"Ex-wife," Mickey corrected her.

"Whatever. But like Michael rapes Jamie, his own goddamn niece, in the last chapter and she has his fucking kid! That is so Freudian and messed up."

Mickey laughed and glanced at Pierce. "I think I'll take you up on that twenty bucks," he told the other boy. "I'll need it for my Halloween costume."

Pierce did a double take and he gaped in Mickey in outrage. "Where the fuck is your costume dude?!"

"Thanks for noticing," Mickey said flatly.

"Well you've got the letters," Pierce said, "I thought you were going as Curt's boyfriend or something."

"Ooh that would be hot," Laney said in a suddenly sultry voice, biting her lip at whatever image had flooded her brain. Mickey and Pierce both looked at her, Pierce in surprise and Mickey in exasperation.

"And to that," he said, hoisting his book bag up on his shoulder, "an extreme goodbye." He turned and headed towards his homeroom, becoming lost in the sea of high school zombies, witches and ghosts.

7. Chapter 7

Michael didn't believe in fate. He didn't believe in anything. He himself was a force, the evil in him pushing him forward, cutting through everyone and everything like a tornado. Fate, destiny...it meant absolutely nothing to him because he was above such things, an unstoppable force that moved ever forwards.

It had been twelve years since he had worn that mask, his own old mask that he had kept all those years after the hospital had exploded. It had all but melted off his face in the heat of the flames that night and when he'd first trekked out to the mountains he'd not thought twice about the mask.

When he'd stolen it from the hardware store all those years ago it had been the child in him wanting to go trick-or-treating again, to wear a mask the way he had the night he'd killed his sister. It was a way to bring himself a sense of security, almost like a blanket, serving double as a death mask to terrify all those who saw him.

But at the end of the day he hadn't needed it. And when he had gone to California to hunt Laurie he'd learned, to his immense amusement, that he had become a marketable Halloween costume, bagged and sold in stores to teenagers and adults, some of whom didn't even know that he was real.

He'd stolen one of those costumes before descending upon Laurie's school and, after killing the EMT, he'd left it behind, until he'd gone to kill Laurie for good. Once again he'd stolen it out of necessity and a sick way of paying homage to all that he'd done in his life and to Haddonfield. But, after his old home had been destroyed that Halloween night, he had once more left it behind and not given much mind to it. Even when he'd determined to go back to Haddonfield he had no intention of masking himself. These people did not know his true face, never had and thus it provided him with more of a cover than any sort of mask.

So when he'd seen it lying on the dark, grey pavement in the diner's parking lot he'd felt the oddest prickle of something that he could only surmise was serendipity. Here, in what he felt would be his last time in his hometown, the mask had found him again. Perhaps, like he

had been to Laurie, it was tied to him. The bone white face, those gaping black eyes...it was as much a ghost to him as it had been to her, to Haddonfield...and as it would be again.

He didn't don the mask after finding it. From what he had been able to gather through careful eavesdropping the town had made it a crime to wear the mask and he needed to be patient, to go undetected as long as possible.

After all...the boy he'd seen that morning was still in school until the afternoon.

The evil was at bay for the moment and it let the child out to play, at least just for a little bit and the child very desperately wanted to see his family before he went out for tricks and treats.

With the mask tucked into the back pocket of his overalls Michael kept to the alleys and byways of the town, pausing every now and then as the little boy remembered vague, far away memories of old bicycle paths and places perfect for games of tag.

Every now and then he would pass by a person or a small group of people who would give him a wide berth, not because they knew who he was but because of the sheer intimidating presence he cut. The little boy giggled and jumped around in glee at the sheer ignorance of these people. They had no idea who he was or what he had done and would do to their town again. He'd gotten away with a joke, found a perfect hiding spot in a game of hide and seek.

When he came to the cemetery he paused for a moment. The little boy knew he had to be quiet and respectful in here or else he'd be in trouble for not showing proper respect for the dead. After a moment Michael walked under the great stone arch and through the freshly painted gate into the serene calm of the graveyard.

Leaves fell thick and fast from the tall, ancient trees that grew in the spacious cemetery, shadowing the tombstones and grave markers. Even after all this time Michael knew the way. He plodded softly across the earth, taking care not to trod on the places reserved for those who had passed on. Michael had a great deal of respect for the dead when they'd been buried. It was the living that continuously infuriated both the evil and the child. The dead did not disappoint or hurt or lie. When they were out of the ground the bodies could be used to great affect to terrify, so in a sense they still got to live by evoking reactions in those they'd left behind, much as he'd taught his sister and nephew.

He found her headstone next to his other sister's. Strange that they hadn't known one another when they'd lived and yet now at eternal peace they could be connected in this way.

Michael cocked his head to the side as he examined the slightly older of the markers.

Judith Margaret Myers.

Beloved Daughter.

Judith...yes, that had been her name. It had been so long and so many faces had replaced hers in that time that he'd forgotten nearly

everything signifying about her. All he could remember was her laugh the night she'd abandoned him to spend time with her boyfriend, her scream as he'd driven the knife home again and again.

It hardly mattered what he remembered of her anymore. She was gone.

Michael looked at the other marker.

Laurie Strode.

A Survivor.

Survivor...is that what they thought of her as? A fighter maybe, and most definitely not a coward but she couldn't be a survivor because survivors survived and she hadn't. She'd merely prolonged her life.

And why Strode? Why did they have to bury her with her fake name from that fake family? The child wailed and cried, stamped his feet in a frustrated tantrum. She was his sister damn it, not a child of the Strode's, whoever those were! It wasn't fair that even in death she wanted to take herself away from him, to distance herself just as much as the other one had. He hadn't meant to make her afraid of him, honest he hadn't! He had just wanted to play with his little sister! The child cried and cried and Michael pondered the possibility of tearing up the earth and crawling into his sister's grave to be with her forever, to finally be near family again after so long but the darkness gently refuted the idea, whispering into the ear of the child in a soft, almost parental purr.

She must have done it on purpose.

Yes that was it.

Even in death she had to cruelly remind him that he would never have her, had never had her.

The evil seized hold of the child and wrapped him round in a shroud of inky blackness. If Laurie wanted to distance herself from him even in the end then she could have it her way...there was still something he could do to show her that she hadn't entirely escaped him.

There was a fair sized shed nestled in the trees of the cemetery, used by the gravediggers and groundskeepers. Michael broke the old lock off the door, with more effort than he was used to using but still it came undone in a matter of seconds.

In the dark, dusty air of the shed he found what it was that he sought. A sledgehammer, propped up against the side of the wall. Michael seized it by it's wooden handle, lifted it off the ground and promptly felt the muscles in his back and shoulder seize up. He dropped the sledgehammer with a heavy thud and staggered backwards, his shoulder screaming in pain.

Rage clouded his vision and he thrashed and stormed violently around the shed, smashing and knocking over everything that could be smashed and knocked over. How dare his body betray him like this, he who had not only cheated death and fatality thus far but been an embodiment of it. After a moment he calmed down, standing stock still in the

shed, breathing heavily, doing his best to ignore the dull throb in his body.

He was tenacious and a bit of age would not stop him. He grabbed the sledgehammer in a tighter grip than before and, rather than lifting it he simply dragged it out of the shed, narrowing his eyes at the irritating sound it made as it ground against the stone floor. It rutted up the earth behind it as he walked back towards the gravestones of his two sisters. He stood there for a moment, in front of Laurie's, breathing deeply, putting all his focus on her, her tenacity and courage, her selflessness and instinct and strength, all the things about her that simultaneously vexed and intrigued him.

He let the hate course through him, hate for all that she had been, for all that they could have had if she had just been smarter that night at the sanitarium. Why did she have to go reaching out for him when she knew full well how dangerous he was?

He restrained the roar of rage as he swung the sledge hammer with all his force. He hadn't spoken a word in thirty five years and he wasn't going to let Laurie be the reason he broke that silence. Even as he felt the already pained muscles in his back stretch to a limit that nearly broke them he made no sound. He let the ear splitting shatter of the tombstone speak for him. It smashed into a hundred pieces, crumbling like a shattered pumpkin, destroying the last vestige of his sister that could haunt him.

The sledgehammer fell away from him, thumping in the dirt next to the rubble that had once been Laurie's tombstone. Michael stood there, breathing heavily, his back aching, his hands curled tightly into fists, not even flinching when a lone crow alighted from a nearby tree and flew dangerously low over his head, letting out it's croaking caw as it came to land on top of Judith's tombstone in a flurry of black feathers. It cocked it's head to the side, beetle black eyes boring into Michael's empty, equally dark ones.

Then he turned his back on his sisters and walked out of the cemetery, not once looking back. Laurie had been a thorn in his side for years, the thing that had been his singular obsession and thirsting desire to see destroyed his entire life. But her time was long over.

Somewhere in the distance a church bell chimed, announcing half past the hour. It would be noon in thirty minutes.

The boy he'd found this morning, the one with with the grass green eyes would be out of school for the time being. Both the evil and the child wanted to see him before they prepared for a night of tricks and treats

8. Chapter 8

Lindsey found the parking lot empty when she arrived ten minutes after leaving the station, much as she'd feared. She didn't know quite why her mind had gone into instinctive mode when Keith had told her about the hijacked truck. Obviously it's previous owner being found with his throat crushed was cause enough to worry but for some reason her mind had made a jump connection between the now missing Michael Myers mask and the beat up old pick up she'd seen earlier

that morning.

Was this what it was like to be paranoid? Her entire life after that night had been spent looking that fear in the eye and determining to meet it head on, just as Laurie had when she'd made keeping her and Tommy safe from the Boogeyman her only priority. Lindsey hadn't had time to jump to conclusions and had learned the hard way when she'd been in Chicago that it wasn't wise to go running after something just because it made you afraid. She had to be cautious and think things through.

But, as she hurried out of her cruiser and stepped onto the worn pavement she couldn't deny the prickly instinct she felt in her gut.

This was a little too slight to be a coincidence. Vehicles tied to recent murder didn't just linger in Haddonfield, at least not without a purpose.

She began her search by scouring the parking lot and everything within it's radius, hoping to be able to put her fears to rest but after checking under every car, tree and bush she began to feel her pulse quicken. She went into the diner and asked any of the staff if they'd seen anybody come back to the lot after she'd taking Brent Elmag in but nobody had been paying any mind to the pavement outside the cozy little eatery. They'd even let her check the trash out back and still nothing. The whole search had taken over an hour and been fruitless.

Grimly Lindsey left the diner and surveyed the houses lining the street across from the restaurant, all festooned for the night ahead. She nixed the idea of asking door to door. People in this town were easily alarmed by the mention of Michael Myers let alone anything to do with him and even if she attempted to pass it on as some kind of hunt for pranksters then tensions would rise. They'd know by now that Brent had been taken in and probably place the blame on him and Lonnie and his boys would doubtless have angry parents to answer to and they had enough of that going on as it was.

Shaking her head, Lindsey decided that the only reasonable course of action was to head back to the station and try to sort things out. She got into her cruiser, started the engine and pulled out of the parking lot, trying to look at things logically.

People were carjacked all the time and less than half those cases ended in fatality. A slim margin yes but still it wasn't as though it never happened. And it wasn't as though Haddonfield was some pokey little hamlet in the prairies. People passed through all the time, usually on their way to Chicago or going south of the state border to Missouri or Kentucky. Perhaps the carjack and possible murderer was trying to put as much distance between himself and Canada as possible and had just happened to go through Haddonfield?

It was always a possibility...

Gripping the steering wheel tightly Lindsey stopped at a red light and rolled down her window, letting the cool autumn air in. Her head was beginning to pound with all of the circles she was running in her mind. Suddenly she didn't want to go back to the station with all of it's noise and clutter. She wanted to go somewhere open and free

where she could leave Haddonfield and all of it's history behind for a few moments, somewhere the shadow of Michael Myers didn't cast itself over everything she saw.

The light turned green.

Instead of proceeding through, Lindsey hung a right, abandoning herself to impulse, ignoring the horn of the irritated driver behind. She continued down the road until the houses began to thin, giving way to the small industrial area and further still onto the outskirts of the town that lead to the open farmlands outside Haddonfield.

The sun was reaching it's apex, casting it's brilliant light over fields of golden corn and wheat. Lindsey drove down the highway, taking it all in peripherally as she kept her eyes on the road, scanning the fields and farms every now and then as old haunts came back to her. Farmhouses where she'd attended parties, hills where she'd gone sledding as a child. She recognized the tall, old willow a ways out by a shallow pond where she'd had sex with Richie Castle in his car back in eleventh grade, back when she'd allowed herself to be somewhat carefree, and back before Richie had turned into an alkie who had the stupidity to breed like a rabbit and end up strung out on welfare with five children to look after, all from different wives.

That too Lindsey pegged down to Michael. Of course nobody believed a lick of it when he told them but Richie had had a close encounter with the killer that day and somehow it had come back to haunt him during his final year of school. He'd once been so full of vitality, trying his damndest to make amends for the little bastard of a child he'd been.

Lindsey figured it was a form of survivor's guilt. She'd believed him when he'd told her during the time they'd dated. The way she saw it you had only to look into those eyes and forever be changed and Richie had described the sheer emptiness of them perfectly one night when they were lying together in his bed.

Thinking of Richie only served to make her feel depressed on top of her anxiety and she swore loudly as a way of releasing the pent up frustration.

She sighed heavily and pulled the car onto a dirt path. She was chasing a ghost here, much in the same way that everyone in Haddonfield was, no matter how old they were. The collapse of the Myers house that night twelve years ago had only served to inflict deeper scars, for although nobody really believed that Michael had been present that night the fact that Dangelertainment had performed a stunt so fatal in that house of all places had awoken a fear of the name Myers in the town, after nearly a quarter of a century of silence.

Lindsey glanced at her reflection in the rearview and smiled sadly. Her eyes were shadowed and she looked tired. "My God I look fifty years old," she said softly. There was no point opening old wounds. She had a carjacker and Mickey to worry about, not to mention a town that was always in need of someone looking out for it.

She headed back to Haddonfield, keeping the window down. It was only half past eleven. She'd have time to go to the high school and have a

talk with Mickey before going back to the station and putting out a watch for the old pick up truck from Canada.

Or at least that's what she'd intended to do.

The radio buzzed in just as Lindsey was driving through the industrial area.

"All available units we've got an M11 at Haddonfield Cemetery." The dispatch voice rang out in gravely static from the CB mounted on the dash.

M11? That was the code for an act of Lindsey responded to the call. The graveyard was on the way to the high school so she wouldn't have to go too far out of her way to meet up with Mickey during his lunch hour period. There was no sense in dragging one of the other officers in to take care of something so basic.

There were few visitors to the cemetery today. The groundskeeper, who had called in with the complaint, was an elderly man with thick grey hair. He was standing nervously at the old stone arch at the front of the graveyard and as Lindsey met up with him at the entrance to the cemetery she could tell from the drawn look on his face that whatever had happened wasn't good.

"Morning Sheriff," he said gravely.

"What happened?" Lindsey asked him, falling into step beside him as they passed through the gate.

"One of the tombstones," the man said. "Someone smashed it in."

"Do you know what they used?"

The man nodded. "Broke into the supply shed and busted it up with a sledgehammer. Didn't bother cleaning up either. Left the hammer right next to the mess."

"Whose grave was it?" Lindsey asked as they walked among the headstones, but the man did not answer. He stopped short and pointed wordlessly forward and Lindsey, seeing what he pointed at, felt her mind go numb.

If she hadn't visited this particular grave so often she would have chalked it up to just another act of careless teenage vandalism but even the most inscrutable punk in Haddonfield viewed the cemetery, and this grave especially, with a degree of respect.

All that remained of Laurie Strode's tombstone was a jagged edge of rock jutting up from the earth. Rubble surrounded the plot, chunks scattered over her resting place and the one of the older sister she'd never known. The larger fragments still had legible writing but those were few and far between. This wasn't a teenager. Not even the sturdiest high school quarterback could have had the power to completely demolish the headstone this way.

Her breath short, Lindsey stammered to the groundskeeper that she would have several officers over to gather evidence, but that she knew was just concession. There wasn't a scrap of trace that they could match to anybody because there never had been, not when it came

to him. She'd checked that for herself when she'd become a part of the force in Chicago.

On shaky legs Lindsey left the cemetery, the feeling of paranoia chilling her even more than the crisp breeze. She had to radio for assistance, that much she knew but beyond that was only the fog of panic and suppressing it was nearly impossible.

She slid into the driver's side of the cruiser and had just reached for the radio when her foot crunched on something sharp that broke beneath the weight. Lindsey looked at the passenger side and felt the bottom drop out from her stomach.

She wasn't known for screaming and this was no exception but still she let out a yelp and scrambled out of the cruiser, her eyes wide, her mind a blank canvas of horror.

The passenger side window had been smashed in and on the seat someone had placed a jack o lantern, turned so that the carved, evil face leered at her from where it sat.

Protruding from the top of the grotesque decoration was a long, lethal kitchen knife.

A prickling sense told Lindsey that eyes were on her. She looked up, over the roof of the cruiser. Her heart jumped into her mouth and bravery went out the window. Suddenly she was six years old and scared again, scared of the bone white, empty eyed Boogeyman who stood in the darkness of a thicket of bushes under the shadow of the trees. He watched her impassively for a moment and then retreated into the canopy of leaves, like a shadow...like a ghost.

9. Chapter 9

Mickey opted to keep facing forward throughout his morning classes, knowing full well that at least three or four of his classmates were talking amongst themselves as to why he hadn't dressed up for the holiday. He was painfully conscious of his letterman hoodie and given the fact that most of the student body knew Curtis' jersey number, which was patched onto the back and sides of the jacket, he had a sneaking suspicion that their initial idea was along the same lines as what Pierce had thought.

It didn't really bother him personally. He'd worn the jacket many times since Curtis had given it to him and was more than used to having it pointed out and neither he nor Curtis really gave a shit what people thought about it.

None of them knew the story behind why it had been given to him in the first place.

He was more worried about the obviously shiny blotch of flesh coloured make up that stood out against his face. He'd gotten a look at himself in the mirror in his homeroom class and had felt his heart sink. The bruise had been covered up despite how sore it still was but Vanessa hadn't judged how pale his skin was and the make up she'd used was just dark enough to be painfully obvious under the school's fluorescent lighting. But he would rather have the occasional snicker thrown his way than have to deal with the wide eyed sympathy and

questioning looks if he'd cleaned his face off and have people seeing his black eye. So for the first two periods Mickey simply put up with it, laughing it off as best he could whenever someone happened to point it out to him.

It was easier to avoid the unwanted attention in art class, which mercifully fell just before lunch. As usual he found Laney, Vanessa, Pierce and Curtis all gathered at their set of easels. Mickey frowned. Usually on days like Halloween Mr. Doyle had anything artsy set aside so that he could bore his students into a coma with his annual lecture about his time in the comic book industry and his narrow escape from the jaws of death when he'd been in elementary school.

The art room seemed to be an extension of Mr. Doyle's whole persona, as though they were part of a complete set. The desks were collapsable and usually occupied most of the room unless they happened to be working with easels or pottery wheels. The walls were bedecked with pieces from students past and present and for extra seasonal flair Mr. Doyle had set up an orange and black paper chain that ran all around the whole room. It looked more like the art room of an elementary school than a senior high.

"You still have time to back out of that bet," Pierce announced with a grin as Mickey dropped his book bag next to a free easel between Curtis and Vanessa.

"Not on your life, my life or the lives of the future biracial children you and Laney are going to have," Mickey replied with a mischievous grin. To his left Curtis chuckled softly at the remark and Mickey glanced quickly at him just as Mr. Doyle entered the room from his office at the back of the class. To his immense relief Curtis met his gaze with a small smile and a nod. They were cool again for which Mickey was incredibly thankful. Out of the corner of his eye he saw a satisfied smirk on Vanessa's face and he suddenly wondered if she hadn't had something to do with bringing Curtis around again.

"Alright guys settle down," Mr. Doyle said, leaning casually against his desk. There was a hush in the buzz, not out of any kind of respect for the man's authority but because the class at large was waiting to see if their teacher was really going to skip his traditional monologue and actually let them make some art.

Mickey and Pierce glanced at one another in a challenging way, both knowing that what Mr. Doyle said next could be the thing that shorted them twenty bucks. Mickey didn't really need the money...he just wanted it.

There was a pause in which Mr. Doyle looked around at his mostly silent class. Then he pushed himself away from his desk and said, "As most of you know by now I used to work in the comic book industry..."

Mickey could practically hear the stifled, collective groan that the class at large suppressed. Many of his classmates simply rolled their eyes having heard the story one time too many. He triumphantly turned his eyes to Pierce who couldn't seem to decide whether or not he wanted to glare daggers at the art teacher or at Mickey, who couldn't resist whispering, "Cha-ching," at his seething friend before turning

back to their teacher.

It was all stuff they could recite in their sleep by this point. He went on for a good ten minutes, telling them all about how he had found a way to turn his fear of Michael Myers into something productive, about how creativity was a key to overcoming obstacles...it was all philosophical and Mickey wondered once more whether or not the man toked on some righteous chronic in his office before each class.

When he'd finished his rambling autobiography he surveyed the class for a moment and then let out a hearty laugh.

"But if you're anything like my ex-wife you've obviously had enough of hearing about all that by now." His eyes twinkled with humour and several students looked at him in disbelief. Tommy Doyle was many things but self-deprecating was not one of them, or so they'd assumed.

"Now I know you probably don't put much stock in this," Mr. Doyle went on, "but what happened that night was nothing short of hell on earth. You've heard of Bundy and Dahmer, both demented, murderous psychopaths who had no regard for human life? Their deeds were carried out over months, even years and they were eventually apprehended...Michael Myers never was. And he murdered thirteen people that night, four of whom were all your guys' age. Take a look at your classmates, your friends and just think about that for a moment..."

Mickey and his friends all glanced at one another almost without thinking and in their eyes he saw his own expression reflected back. A numb sort of disbelief at the idea of losing each other the way those four young people had been lost. It sickened Mickey to think of these four people that he cared about being taken from him but it also made that thing flare up inside of him, that ugly, dark thing that screamed out for the bloody, painful end of anyone or anything that hurt his friends. He took a deep, steadying breath and turned back to face Mr. Doyle who was frowning somewhat, not having anticipated such a reaction from his class.

"Sorry," he said, shaking his head and making his ponytail dance. "I didn't mean to scare you guys it's just...well it's a painful thing for a lot of folks around here to remember." He paused for a moment and a haunted look passed over his face. It made the hairs on the back of Mickey's neck prickle uncomfortably. Such a showing of emotion was rare for the art teacher who spent most of his time looking like a contented cow.

"Does he still scare you?" Laney's voice ran out through the silence. Heads turned to stare at her but Laney wasn't embarrassed easily and she kept her wide eyes, even further magnified by her glasses, fixed on the man at the front of the class. "Michael Myers I mean," she amended.

Mr. Doyle gazed at her thoughtfully for a moment and then laughed softly. "The real Michael Myers does, yes." He said. "I created the curse in my comic books because it explained him and made him familiar, understandable. Anyone wanna tell me how that could have helped?"

Almost without thinking Mickey raised his hand and when Mr. Doyle pointed at him he said in a quiet voice, "Cause you knew him then when you could explain it...and people are only afraid of things that they don't understand." Just like that angry darkness he possessed.

"Exactly," Mr. Doyle said. "For years I lived comfortably with this idea that I had created a method to the evil behind that man, not that it did much good." He shook his head bitterly. "There are things that I wrote into that story that I still can't forgive myself for but anyone who has a creative instinct, any instinct really, knows that sometimes that's all you have to go with, even if it's something you don't want to do or have never thought of doing in your life." He sighed and gazed up at the ceiling lights for a moment before looking back at his awestruck students. Mickey himself had never remembered an art class so enthralling in all the four years he'd had the subject. He'd taken it because it was fun for him to get to create things and because all four of his friends had been enrolled and he'd wanted at least one class with all four of them present. Never before had he seen this side of Tommy Doyle and he realized then that even though the man could be irritatingly deep and a little too eager to keep up appearances he really had been through quite a lot, both personally and professionally.

"I was going to continue the series," he admitted. "But things happened...the Strode's filed a defamation lawsuit, Samuel Loomis passed away, my wife divorced me. That's enough to make anyone hang up the pencil and eraser." He laughed bitterly and continued, "But the reason I stopped was because I got a pretty grim reminder that Michael Myers was not just some kind of boogeyman I'd defined on paper. He was real and completely alive. Have any of you heard of Hillcrest Academy?"

A handful of students raised their hands.

"Well it was after news of that broke that I realized I'd been making an ass out of myself, taking advantage of real life tragedies just because I'd wanted to explain all my fears away." He paused again and then added in a much more professional tone, "I don't expect you all to become the next Patrick Nagel with this class. Art is about expression remember and even though we mostly express the beautiful and positive we have to express the negative too, things that make us uncomfortable and yes, even scare us." He gave his class a level stare. "Michael Myers in real life is evil, not as a result of some contrived curse but because he chooses to live in darkness. We've got forty-five minutes left in class. Since it's Halloween I want you all to express your fears through art. You've got the canvas and paints in front of you. Don't limit yourself. Draw what evil looks like to you. To get you started I'll show you what it looks like to me." And with that he went around his desk, crouched down and reappeared a second later holding a bone white mask with empty eyes.

The class as a whole gasped even though they'd all seen it before. The ones that people wore as pranks were always clean, fresh from the assembly line and somehow a little off from what Michael Myers' mask had been. The one Mr. Doyle presented to them was scuffed in places, torn at the ends as though it had been through a lot over many many years.

He smiled at their wide eyes.

"Just a prop," he told them. "From a movie that never got further than pre-production. This," he stuck his hand up the mask and showed it all to the class, "is what evil looks like to me. This is what scares me. You've got less than an hour to show me what one of those things means to you. Don't bother being fancy. Just show me."

Mickey didn't consider himself much of a painter. His art skills had improved significantly since he'd been in high school but he wasn't exceptionally good at it.

But he knew what evil looked like and knew also that it was that very same thing that scared him. He didn't know how to put it to canvas though and for a moment he simply stared at the blank stretch of white as the gentle sound of pencils and brushes against canvas filled the room. He closed his eyes in a better attempt to picture the thing he had envisioned.

He couldn't draw his father. He wanted to but he knew far better than that. Mr. Doyle would probably wonder why in the world he'd drawn it, the old man would be brought in and dodge all the accusations as usual and then the second they were home he'd lay into Mickey all over again.

Besides he couldn't figure out how to draw his father in a way that would be appropriate for someone who'd spent all four years of high school in an art class. Figures weren't his strong suit.

The minutes ticked by and every now and then Mickey picked up his paint brush and pretended to apply it to the canvas, glancing up at Mr. Doyle just to make sure that the man wasn't aware that he was essentially fibbing his way through an entire period.

As his classmates started to rest their pencils and brushes Mr. Doyle walked to their easels, examined their work and dismissed them, asking questions once in a while.

Laney was dismissed twenty minutes before the end of the period and Pierce shortly thereafter.

Mickey chewed on his bottom lip, a brush gripped tightly in his hand, seized by an overwhelming sense of panic. What if Mr. Doyle questioned him about why he was hesitant to draw his depiction of the singular thing he viewed as evil and frightening? He didn't want to add one more person to his list of people who continuously wanted to rescue him from his father.

Vanessa set her paintbrush down and frowned at what she'd drawn. Then she shrugged and raised her hand for Mr. Doyle, who would be passing behind Mickey on the way back from examining Vanessa's picture.

He gave himself over to his urges and picked up the sharpening knife, his brow furrowed as he carved into the canvas, picturing his father and all that he had ever done to him, letting the hatred and fear pass from him into the tip of the blade.

Then for added effect he dipped his brush into the well of scarlet paint and made one broad stroke over what he'd etched into the material. He raised his hand and slung his book bag over his shoulder. Whether Mr. Doyle approved or not he wasn't going to stay

in class another second longer.

The man sidled up to Mickey and looked at his canvas. He blinked in apparent surprise, his mouth opening in a small O. He glanced from the picture to Mickey and then gave a weak nod.

Rolling his eyes Mickey turned and headed out of the classroom, grateful to be free from a reminder of what he tried hard to leave behind whenever he was at school. Once outside the door he looked back once just out of curiosity. His easel was still visible from the door and Mr. Doyle was still standing there, staring at it.

Carved into the canvas in large, jagged letters was the word FATHER, the paint smeared across it like a streak dripping onto the blank white below, like blood against bone.

10. Chapter 10

The smartest thing for Lindsey to have done would have been to go back to the station and turn the jack-o-lantern in for evidence. But there was something about her simply just being in the car with that thing that made her skin crawl. Michael had touched it, had left it specifically for her as a grisly little Halloween treat. Being near it made her feel as though he were still there, watching her every move.

In the immediate aftershock of having seen Michael, Lindsey tried with all of her might to convince herself that everything, from the stolen truck to this macabre pumpkin was just a coincidence and that the masked man had just been another practical joker but it was a feeble fight, one fought out of a paranoid desire to keep things in Haddonfield peaceful.

The truck, the missing mask, Laurie's destroyed tombstone, the clear message in her cruiser...it all pointed to the one undeniable fact that Michael Myers had returned. The sighting had only been him sealing that reality and when she really thought of it even the most devoted prankster couldn't hold a candle to how intimidating the man was, how tall and threatening he was even in just simply standing motionless.

She slid against the side of the cruiser, that frightened little girl still clinging to her and before she could help herself she was sobbing uncontrollably in broad daylight. Never mind that she was now a sheriff with twenty years of experience as a cop in one of the toughest cities in the country. What were drug dealers and gang-bangers when compared to the sheer, unstoppable evil of that nightmare of a man? What could she possibly do to stop him if he was truly here to wreak bloody havoc once more?

You can get the hell a hold of yourself for starters, a sharp voice that sounded like Laurie rang out in her mind as it often did whenever she found herself weighed down by moments like this. _You're a grown woman Lindsey Wallace and a damn fine sheriff._

Lindsey stifled her sobs and wiped at her tear stained face, nodding as though in answer to that voice. Yeah she was going to calm down. There was a town at stake and it wouldn't help anybody for the sheriff to go bursting into tears just because the boogeyman was

back.

Lindsey glanced at her watch. It was almost noon now.

She radioed the station and told them to send two officers to the cemetery to gather evidence, more as a way to give the groundskeeper a peace of mind as well as to process her cruiser and requested all units to be extra vigilant and immediately report any sightings of people dressed in Michael Myers costumes.

It wouldn't do any good to ring the alarm. Nobody would want to believe her anyway.

After sending out the dispatch Lindsey started walking towards the high school, hoping the exercise would help calm her down and allow her to think straight. She kept a hand close to her belt and scanned the sides of the street but somehow she knew without really knowing how that she wasn't in any danger yet.

Michael wouldn't want his presence discovered this early in the day. Still as she took the twenty minute walk from the graveyard to the high school she couldn't help but look at every shadow in a curious paranoia, wondering what he was doing back here and what, or rather who he wanted this time.

To Lindsey's knowledge he'd never come back. There were of course those people who swore to God that they'd seen him on the live internet broadcast over a decade ago but the fact that most of those people had been drunk partiers at the time of the feed didn't add much credibility to their statements. The authorities had even gotten a confession from the head of Dangertainment who had admitted to dressing up as Michael to add some excitement to the broadcast and as far as they were concerned that was good enough to explain what few sightings they'd gathered from the surviving video footage.

She felt helpless but with that came a stubborn determination to put a stop to whatever it was that Michael wanted now. The trouble was she had no clear idea how to meet him head on and there was now nobody left alive who knew how that man's mind worked. Lindsey figured that not even the redoubtable Dr. Loomis knew quite what it was that made his old patient tick, although she guessed that the man had come closer than anyone.

By the time she had the high school in her sights the bell for lunch had already rung. Students were pouring out of the doors, heading to their cars or to the field or else walking in little groups, all costumed for the holiday, all talking excitedly. Lindsey watched them and her maternal instinct went into overdrive. If Michael thought he was going to have himself a repeat of thirty-five years ago then he had another thing coming. This was her town and even though some of the teens here frustrated her beyond belief they were as much her children as they were their parents'.

Mickey usually spent the hour in the cafeteria or the library but as Lindsey entered the spacious foyer of the school she was struck by a sudden, unexpected inspiration.

There weren't any experts on Michael Myers in Haddonfield anymore...but there was one former fanatic, someone she knew worked as a teacher now, somebody she hadn't seen in a very long time. It

was a slim chance but at the moment Lindsey really needed somebody to share her fears with and after what they'd been through together when they were children they had a lot of common ground.

She stopped one of the students and asked where the art room was located and after being directed she headed through the halls of thinning students. Mickey could wait for ten minutes and given the reception she'd received that morning he probably wanted to postpone meeting with her again as long as possible.

The art classroom was empty, a cluster of paintings set up on easels the only evidence that students had actually been there at all. One in particular, close to the door of the classroom, caught Lindsey's eye the second she entered. A carving more than a painting really, the word FATHER etched into the canvas and smeared with a thick coat of crimson paint. She shivered involuntarily as she looked at it, unnerved by the primitive simplicity and sheer suggestive brutality of the piece.

A door opened at the back of the room and Lindsey looked around the easels and saw a stocky man with an untidy ponytail and a five o'clock shadow step out of a back office, munching on a bit of bagel.

She had only seen him once since he'd come back to Haddonfield, at a safety speech she'd given at the high school shortly after he'd started teaching and he looked the same as ever, stuck in a perpetual state of bachelorhood.

Tommy blinked in surprise when he saw her approaching his desk and swallowed his bagel before saying in a somewhat disbelieving voice, "Lindsey?"

She chuckled at the look and then nodded. There would always be the singular trauma of Michael's attack that connected them. They'd lost touch after high school although Lindsey had at one point gone to a convention and gotten Tommy to sign a copy of his graphic novel for her.

She strode around the desk and hugged him briefly before she could stop herself. Tommy seemed a little taken aback by the embrace but was smiling when she finally stepped away from him. He was a good seven or eight inches taller than her although Lindsey figured he was probably dwarfed by most of the male students.

"You look good," he told her with an appreciative grin.

"Likewise," Lindsey replied.

"Oh cut the bullshit I look ridiculous and I always have."

Lindsey laughed and then looked over her shoulder at the distant easel. "Hey Tommy who did that one back there? The, uh, carving?"

Tommy's face clouded for a second as he gazed at the easel. "A student in my last period...Mickey Morris."

"Fantastic," Lindsey muttered to herself as she felt her heart sink. She'd been afraid of that. "What exactly was the assignment?"

"I told the class to either draw something that scared them or what evil looked like to them." Tommy frowned as he thought for a moment. "Most chose to make something that they were afraid of but I don't really know what Mickey's is supposed to mean."

Lindsey considered telling Tommy about what was happening in the Morris home but thought better of it. She would never betray Mickey's or anybody else's trust that way and she knew that the last thing the kid wanted was having a teacher knowing what his home life was like.

Tommy seemed to get the memo that she wouldn't be elaborating. "What brings you here Lindsey? I doubt you wanted to pay me a visit just to talk shop about my student's art projects."

Lindsey took a deep breath and then, looking him square in the eye she said, "What would you say if I told you that...that I thought Michael Myers was here in Haddonfield?"

Tommy's eyes widened. Without hesitation he answered, "I would say 'holy shit I hope not.' Why, did you see him?"

Lindsey nodded and told him about everything that had happened that morning, from the stolen truck to the pumpkin in her cruiser. When she told him about Michael watching her from the trees by the cemetery Tommy shivered and sat down in his chair behind the desk.

"And he just stood there?" He asked, his eyes wide as dinner plates.

Lindsey nodded.

"Jesus Christ," Tommy said with a low breath.

"It wasn't a kid in a costume," Lindsey said. "I hauled one in this morning and the way that he stood was nowhere near what Michael was like." She didn't have to tell Tommy about what it felt like to see that man watching you with his soulless eyes. He knew all too well. He was silent for a moment and Lindsey in desperation to seize the opportunity quickly added, "You...you believe me right?"

Tommy looked into her eyes and Lindsey was taken back to that night when he'd desperately tried to alert Laurie to the boogeyman outside. Their babysitter had thought Tommy had just been trying to scare her but Lindsey knew perfectly well that Tommy had seen him, had only tried to warn them.

"Course I believe you," he said, holding her gaze. "You believed me that night, even when Laurie didn't."

Lindsey smiled wanly at him and said, "So you think he's alive then?"

"There's no proof that he ever died."

"But all that's happened to him," Lindsey said persistently, "getting stabbed, shot, blown up...it's just hard to imagine him cheating death that many times."

Tommy shrugged. "There's always an explanation."

Lindsey grinned and said teasingly, "Like curses?"

Tommy laughed but shook his head. "Curses are for hacks struggling to make a resolution to their story. No I think that among his other tendencies Michael's impervious to pain." He paused and added, "You ever heard of congenital anhidrosis?"

"Um I can't say that I have," Lindsey said with a little laugh. She wasn't even sure that what Tommy had said was actually English.

"It's a rare inherited nervous system disorder," Tommy explained. "It's known by other names. I did a shit ton of research back when I first started writing the comics, trying to find things that would explain Michael...like, everything about him really and one of the things I found was this disorder."

"What exactly makes you think Michael could have it?"

"Well basically what happens with it is that it makes certain people impervious to feelings of pain and extreme temperatures and things like that. I mean, you could shoot someone three times in the chest and they'd keep coming at you because they just don't feel anything. At least until you blast them between the eyes."

"Why go with the curse angle then?" Lindsey couldn't help but ask. It unnerved her to think that Michael was so resilient due to perfectly legitimate medical science and she couldn't help but wonder if Tommy had been onto something in his research.

"From the marketing side of things," Tommy said with a wry grin, "that kind of scientific shit didn't sell back in the day. People were hyped on all that New Age mysticism and wicca stuff in the mid-nineties. My agent wanted something a bit spookier." He sighed and added, "From a personal perspective giving Michael's...evil a medical explanation made him human. And I don't like to think of anything with that kind of antipathy towards human life as human. Making it psychological just means that anybody could become Michael Myers if the right chips were in place and that scares the hell out of me." He met her eyes and she knew at once that Tommy, like her, still held onto that fear of the boogeyman in some way. Perhaps that was why he'd chosen to write about it, not as a way to cash in as some people believed, but as a way to exorcise his fears.

"I don't know what I'm going to do," Lindsey told him in a small voice. "I can't cancel Halloween...that didn't work out so well in...what did you name that chapter? Oh yeah...The Curse of Michael Myers."

Tommy looked at her, surprised.

"What did you think?" She asked him with a laugh. "That I'd just picked up your book on the day I got you to sign it?"

"Well kinda," he admitted. Then becoming serious again he said, "It'd still be Halloween in Michael's mind anyway so even banning trick or treating and all Halloween parties wouldn't do much but keep people

secluded in their homes and it's not like that's ever stopped him before."

"I hate this," Lindsey said bitterly. "He's making me feel so goddamn powerless and I'm the fucking sheriff for Christ's sake!"

Tommy shrugged. "You're a smart girl Lindsey. You'll figure something out. And hey at least this time you won't have me hiding behind the drapes and trying to scare you."

They laughed at the little inside joke. Even though things still seemed hopeless she had to admit that sharing her fears with her old friend had helped calm her down, at least a little.

The door to the classroom opened. Lindsey looked around and saw a girl with long red hair in a shockingly revealing angel's costume standing tentatively at the back of the classroom, her pale blue eyes unsure behind her glasses.

"Oh sorry Mr. Doyle," the girl said, "I'll come back at the end of the day."

"Don't worry about it," Lindsey told her. "I need to get going anyway." In a low voice she said to Tommy, "Do not tell anybody about this alright? The last thing I need is a panicked town on my hands."

"I'll take it to the grave," Tommy said solemnly.

"Don't say that," Lindsey told him sharply. Then, turning, she walked out of the classroom and back up to the foyer, her eyes travelling from student to student.

Whatever it was that she was going to do she wasn't going to let Michael take more innocent lives, even if she had to bite the dust with him to see to that.

11. Chapter 11

Mickey had still had ten minutes before the bell had sounded for the lunch hour. He'd headed for his locker and to his amusement had seen Pierce scrambling with his things in an attempt to make a break for it bit Laney, standing next to him and noticing Mickey, pulled her boyfriend for a drawn out, distracting kiss.

"You're making me sick," he said as he drew level with them and opened his locker.

"Damn," Pierce muttered, looking down at Laney who met his eyes innocently. Once again his wig had toppled off and against the green linoleum it looked like a half run over poodle. "You did that on purpose didn't you?"

Laney nodded and gave a little giggle. Resignedly Pierce fished around in his pocket for a twenty dollar bill. Mickey, who had just closed his own locker felt a tug in the hem of his pants and looked around in time to see the money tucked into the waist band of his jeans. He eyed his friend warily and said, "Dude your girlfriend's right in front of us."

"Oh don't mind me," Laney said with a husky purr in her voice.

Both Pierce and Mickey rolled their eyes and as the lunch bell rang, Mickey snatched the twenty out from his pants. He'd had enough snickering with the badly applied eye make up and he didn't really need people noticing money poking out from his pants and wondering whether or not he was dressing as a hustler for Halloween.

As he joined the mass of students migrating to the cafeteria somebody called his name and turning around he saw Vanessa hurrying through the rush towards him, her pigtails thrown behind her shoulder.

"Where the hell do you think you're going?" She demanded as she caught up with him.

"Well seeing as it's lunch I was kinda hoping to go to where food is being served."

She gave him a playful slap on the arm and said, "You are so totally not having that shitty cafeteria food! We've got pass period together today and I am taking us out for lunch." She paused and, glancing at his lack of costume added, "And costume shopping. You're totally sticking out today."

"Are you sure it's not because of the half-assed make up job?" He couldn't resist throwing the little jibe her way but Vanessa only laughed and, half-dragging him by the arm, led the way to the parking lot where Curtis' car was still parked from this morning.

"Where's Curt?" Mickey asked blankly as Vanessa unlocked the car and went around to the driver's side.

"Weight room," Vanessa replied as she slid behind the steering wheel. "Since the gym's out of commission Mr. Compton wants the team to train in there today."

"And he trusted you with his car?" Mickey asked in disbelief as he buckled up. The last time Curtis had let Vanessa drive his SuperBee she'd nearly driven them off the road and into a cornfield.

"I'll be totally careful!" She promised, turning her wide blue eyes to him in a look of sincerity. Mickey rolled his eyes but sat back, praying to God that they'd make the drive to whatever restaurant Vanessa had in tact. He felt a little put out that Curtis hadn't been able to come with them and a part of him wondered whether or not the other boy was still mad at him.

Don't be stupid, he told himself as Vanessa drove them away from the school, he's got a game to get ready for at the end of next month.

Vanessa drove them to a diner near the shopping district. It was an old building, set far back in a large parking lot and had once, back when it had first been established in the fifties, been a drive in restaurant. Nowadays it was more of a local hang out and the lot itself was a popular meeting spot for fights and games of street hockey. Inside it was the very picture of a middle American diner with booths stuffed comfortably up together and stools set at the

counter. It could have passed for a fifties style eatery if it hadn't been for the adult contemporary radio station blasting music out of the mounted speakers. This early in the afternoon it was nearly empty, occupied by the odd trucker or elderly couple but soon after Mickey and Vanessa claimed a table that overlooked the tree shaded street beyond more students from the high school started to pour in and soon the diner was buzzing with conversation and noise.

"You missed out on a takedown," the frizzy haired waitress said as she took their order.

"What happened?" Mickey asked. "Somebody double park their tractor in the parking lot?"

"Funny," the waitress drawled with a roll of her eyes. "No, Sheriff Wallace hauled in one of the Elamb boys for dressing like Michael Myers."

"What a total retard," Vanessa said indignantly as the waitress walked off. "It was probably Brent. Geez I thought he'd have got the message after getting suspended."

Mickey shrugged. "Some people never change," he said.

While waiting for their food they decided to help each other out with school work. Mickey attempted to pay close attention as Vanessa attempted to explain neurones and particle theory to him but as usual when it came to the scientific and mathematical stuff he drew a blank.

When their food came they put away their books and papers and talked while they ate. Ms. Kellerman had, according to Vanessa, totally flipped a bitch when she'd seen what the blonde had done to her cheerleading outfit in the name of Halloween.

"She's totally overreacting if you ask me," Vanessa said as she dipped a french fry into some ketchup. "We'll be switching to the winter uniform in next to no time so I don't see why it matters."

"She probably just forgot to buy some Menthol Lights before school started," Mickey said as he munched on a hamburger.

The diner had thinned by the time they were finished eating. The lunch hour was over and most of the students had to head back for afternoon classes or else were going to study in the school's library. Mickey found the diner's atmosphere more relaxing than being at school and seeing as how he and Vanessa were going costume shopping during their pass period they remained in the diner for several minutes, during which Mickey attempted to help Vanessa with her English essay on East of Eden.

He'd really enjoyed reading the book for class but Vanessa as it turned out had opted for watching the movie instead and then filling in the blanks with the book. It was a small wonder she'd failed the practice paper so badly.

As she ranted about the stupidity of the subject Mickey found himself tuning her out and staring out the window, his head resting on his hand as he watched the dead leaves fall from the trees that lined the

opposite street.

The school day would be ending and then he'd have to go home for a few hours and get ready for the dance. His mother had taken the day to work from home to watch Dexter before she and his father went to their annual Halloween party. The dance started at six which meant he could spend a few nice hours with his brother and be with his friends for the rest of the night. He wouldn't have to see his father until the next morning. Maybe things would be better then...

Mickey blinked.

There was somebody watching him from the other side of the street, just beyond the parking lot.

He peered closer and felt a small jolt of shock. Yes, there was somebody, a tall, intimidating man wearing dark, dirty mechanics overalls standing among the shadows of the trees, looking directly at him even across the considerable distance.

He grimaced.

The bastard was wearing a Michael Myers costume in broad daylight. Obviously Brent Elamb wasn't the only one taking advantage of people's fears. What the hell was the matter with people? Dressing up in that costume was neither funny nor clever and Mickey glowered back at the man angrily. As he stared he had to admit that the guy cut a pretty impressive Michael Myers. He seemed to occupy the shade of the trees with his height and breadth and as he continued to stare Mickey felt the unsettling sense that the man had been watching him and Vanessa for a while.

"Mickey!" Vanessa's voice snapped Mickey out of his staring contest with the creep across the street and he turned to look at her, a dumb expression on his face. She gave him a withering look and said, "You totally spaced out on me! I was just asking you what your essay was about."

"Hm?" Mickey mumbled, forgetting where they were and what they had been doing for a microsecond. When his brain was operating at full speed again he said, "Oh yeah sorry. Well mine was about like how John Steinbeck was trying to say that evil is something that has to be like grown in someone instead of just something that people are born with but that they can be saved from it." He pulled his paper out of his book bag and added, "Caleb turned out to be evil because of the stuff that happened in his life and whatever but in the end he was redeemed by his family's love because his father forgave him and he really felt remorse for Aron dying in the war."

"So love saves from evil?" Vanessa asked in apparent surprise. When Mickey nodded she said, "Okay that totally was not in the movie."

"It isn't really in the book either," Mickey said with a laugh. "You just kinda have to read between the lines." He glanced out the window again and saw to his relief that the Michael Myers impersonator had left the scene.

Good riddance, he thought. Even he didn't think that dressing in that costume was funny. Given the right opportunity he could pull a

better practical joke than the lowlifes who went around dressing up like that every Halloween.

"How the hell do they expect me to be good at this shit if I have to write about things that aren't even in the book?" Vanessa fumed. "I totally have no imagination."

Mickey glowered at her.

"You have so got an imagination," he said. "Just look at the costume you whipped up. You can't buy that in any store and it looks pretty damn great so from where I'm sitting you have a pretty damn good imagination. You just have to have the right thing to apply it to."

Vanessa looked at him hopefully. "Totally?" She asked him.

Mickey grinned. "Totally," he assured her. Then, glancing at his watch he added, "If we wanna make fifth we better hurry to the party store."

Just before they left the restaurant he looked out the window once more just to make sure but there was nobody watching. Mickey shook his head. If someone wanted to get their rocks off by trying to spook people by dressing as that man then it just meant more work for Lindsey.

The party shop looked as though it were recovering from a tornado. Most of the bagged costumes had been shuffled to the front of the store, along with whatever decorations hadn't sold out. As Vanessa and Mickey perused the limited selection they both noticed the sales associates busy setting up thanksgiving and Christmas merchandise in other aisles.

"You could always just put some zombie make up on and go as my zombie jock boyfriend," Vanessa suggested, holding up a packet. "You could totally dump fake blood on yourself and everything!"

Mickey gave her a flat look that clearly told her that that was the last thing he was going to do. Curtis' letterman sweater meant too much to him to have it messed up in anyway. He didn't even like getting the smallest bit of dirt on it.

They'd nearly gone through all of the costumes when Mickey spotted another bag on the floor behind the ones set out for display. Frowning he stopped and pulled it out from behind the other costumes.

It was a clown costume, full bodied with cuffed wrists and a flimsy frill at the neck. It was black and white, the colours mismatched and asymmetrical, divided by the big white buttons that ran up the front.

There was a mask too, that covered the eyes, shiny metallic silver with a bulbous black pom-pom nose. Mickey felt drawn to it for some reason and before he knew it he was asking one of the attendants if he could try it on in the changing rooms. Vanessa had gone off to browse the Christmas decorations and as Mickey slipped into the changing booth he saw her running her hand over a length of garland.

The costume like most things was baggy on him but not in a way that would make it difficult for him to walk. As he looked at himself in the full length mirror he couldn't help but smile slightly. Somehow the idea of dressing up as clown just seemed right to him and he wondered why he hadn't thought of it before. There had always been something kind of sad about clowns to him, that desire to get the world to be happy no matter what...It reminded him of how he was always the one trying to make his friends laugh. A clown was perfect.

He pulled the mask over his eyes and stared at himself in the mirror.

Yes...this was perfect, this letter boxed bird's eye view. He could see but only just and only what he needed to see. He imagined walking down a dark street with this mask on, following his parents home from another night of drunken fun, watching them from the shadows as they giggled and stumbled over themselves. They'd laugh when they saw him at first, unaware of what was behind the mask, of what he would do to them the second they turned away...

Mickey blinked, staring at his own reflection, eyes wide behind the mask.

Slowly he pulled it off.

No...no he wouldn't wear the mask, not if it made it easier for those thoughts to come bubbling to the surface.

He found Vanessa examining a glass baby Jesus after he left the changing stall, still wearing his costume. She turned when she heard him draw near and smiled widely upon seeing his chosen costume. He wouldn't have to take it off since he was going back to school and had stuffed his street clothes into his book bag along with the mask.

"Aww sweetie that is totally you!" She gushed.

"Yeah I kinda like myself in it," Mickey admitted. He paid for the costume and together he and Vanessa headed back to the SuperBee, both talking excitedly about the night ahead of them. As they drove passed the diner again Mickey glanced at the side street just out of curiosity. Nobody was standing in the shadows of the trees watching them. He shook his head, annoyed at how jumpy he was being. Lindsey had probably been alerted and hauled the asshole down to the station to sit in a jail cell with Brent Elamb.

They arrived at the high school a few minutes before the bell for class change rang.

"See you after school," Vanessa said with a grin and gave him a quick hug. Mickey smiled at her, hopped out of the car and headed towards his afternoon physics class, grinning whenever one of the passing students happened to take note of his outfit change. He felt, as he often did without it, somewhat naked without Curtis' letters but for the time being he was just enjoying how comfortable it felt to be among the costumed.

There was a surprise waiting for him on his desk when he got to his

physics class just as the late bell began to sound. It was a plastic bundle filled with candy corn and black and orange jelly beans. It was tied in orange ribbon and the paper ghost tag read "Enjoy your Haddonfield High School Candy-Gram!"

Frowning, Mickey turned the tag over just out of curiosity and saw a message in similar handwriting to the one on the front of the paper:

Happy Halloween Mousey

He grinned. The student union in charge of delivering the candy-grams may have written the message down but there was only one person among his friends who knew that Dexter called him that.

Curtis really wasn't mad at him after all.

12. Chapter 12

The last two classes of the day had gone by rather well for Mickey, especially his physics class, which was a rare occurrence since he spent most of his time in that subject with a massive headache. He spent the entire period taking notes and munching on the treats in his candy-gram, smiling whenever he thought about the little note that Curtis had left for him. He wasn't the most vocal out of all Mickey's friends, not unless he was angry, but he was known for his gestures. The hoodie and the candy-gram were primary examples of that.

Laney met him at his locker after the last bell rang.

"Guess who you love?" She said with a cheeky smile.

"I'm guessing you."

"You're damn right!" Laney's eyes were sparkling with excitement and before Mickey had even deposited his books she burst out, "I signed the five of us up to be on the clean up detail for the dance tonight!"

Mickey looked at her incredulously. "And why in the hell would I be excited about doing that?"

"Because," Laney said with a devilish grin the completely clashed with her angelic attire, "the after party is when the real fun begins. All they need is five students plus one supervising teacher and I found out from Mrs. Hill that our favourite art teacher is that supervisor!"

Mickey raised his eyebrows.

"Think about it," Laney continued, "the dance is gonna be a total bore because half the staff will be making sure we don't do anything fun. The clean up is our chance to have a real Halloween party and since Mr. Doyle's so damn lame we can get away with more."

Mickey laughed as he stared at Laney with mingled disbelief and admiration. "You are so demented!" He told her with a smile.

Laney wrinkled her nose at him and replied with, "And that's why you love me," before bustling off to go meet Pierce at the usual after school meeting place.

Mickey felt a sense of giddy anticipation as he stowed his things in his locker. It had been a while since he and his friends had done anything other than hang out on the weekends and even though he'd most likely get a grilling if they got caught doing anything they shouldn't be the prospect of having some real fun with his friends was exhilarating.

Curtis and Vanessa would both have practice and Mickey had just made up his mind to go out to the field and watch the teams when his iPhone went off in his book bag. Frowning, he dug in the front pocket for it and saw to his consternation that it was a call from the house phone.

"What's up?" He asked with a sinking feeling when he answered.

"Hey honey." His mother sounded exhausted and harried. In the background Mickey could hear the sounds of Dexter making a fuss. "You're coming home right after school right?"

"Uh...well I was gonna wait for Curt and Nessa to give me a lift...I mean before the dance and everything."

"Oh..." His mother paused for a long moment and Mickey could practically see all the good things that had happened to him that day being ripped away from him in one singular, cruel second. "I'm really sorry sweetheart but I need you to watch Dexter tonight."

"But I thought you were gonna get one of the girls to do it!" Mickey couldn't see the point in causing an argument with his mother but he still couldn't help it. It really wasn't fair that he have this dumped on him so suddenly.

"Nobody's available," she replied with a cool, clipped edge to her voice. "They called me in for a few hours and then I'll be going to the party with Dad."

"What do they need you at the office for anyway?!"

"Mickey!" His mother said sharply, "really it shouldn't matter why, all that matters is that I have to be down there in the next twenty minutes and your brother is not staying home alone!" She let out a huff and added, "I can't believe how selfish you can be sometimes!"

Mickey's fingers clenched tightly around his phone as rage seized hold of him at her words. So according to her it was his fault that she had decided that skipping out to the party early was more important than finding decent care for her youngest child? His fingers curled around the phone and he wondered just how good his mother would feel about guilt tripping him with his fingers crushing her trachea. Her eyes would bug out and she would stare at him in confusion, searching for her son in the cold eyes that met hers as he squeezed the life out of her.

Mickey leaned against his locker in an effort to calm himself down.

"Fine," he told her sharply. "But I'm only doing this for Dexter." And with that he hung up and whirled around, his blood pounding in his ears as he stalked through the crowd of students.

If it wasn't his father being an abusive asshole who wallowed in submission it was his mother acting as though the only person at fault in times like these was him. He couldn't understand just why the fuck they couldn't give him a break for five minutes.

He heard somebody call out to him but didn't bother looking back, too pissed off to give any notice to the person. The longer he stayed in the school the more he'd be reminded of what he had to give up now. He wouldn't be able to see Curtis or Vanessa and thank Curt for the candy-gram. There was no point in him having wasted his money on the costume because he wouldn't be going to the dance anyway and now there was no fun to be had with his friends cleaning up after the party. His parents liked to party late, and given the fact that they'd most likely be pissed at him for the grief he'd given they'd end up staying out as late as possible just to spite him.

He stormed out the front doors, his head down, walking as fast as he could through the students. The walk home would take twenty minutes alone and his mother would lay it on even more if he made her have to wait.

The wind had picked up since that afternoon, hissing through the trees and sending dead leaves rustling over the street. Mickey had half a mind to pull his letterman hoodie out of his book bag but at that particular point in time he was too angry to want to do anything so rational. Besides, wearing the hoodie over his clown costume would make him look ridiculous.

He kept his eyes to the ground as he took the long walk home, his mind a hurricane of anger. Around him Haddonfield was already coming to life with early trick or treaters, smaller children with early bed times who had been let out of school earlier than the senior high students.

He noticed them out of the periphery of his vision and it helped his mood somewhat to see all the pint-sized witches, pirates and princesses toddling down the street with their parents leading them, clutching little plastic jack-o-lanterns, their little faces lit up with delight.

At least he'd be able to take Dexter trick-or-treating for a little while. His brother was now just old enough to actually enjoy the holiday and his mother had purchased him a little astronaut costume a few days ago. Mickey would take Dexter out for a little bit, come back home and tuck him in to bed, assuming he was tired enough.

Still, as he took the road that led to the intersection where they'd nearly collided with the pick up truck that morning he couldn't help but feel cheated of what could have been a great night with his friends.

Okay now that is a little bit selfish, he admitted as he crossed the intersection and hurried to the side street, his head bowed against the wind. As much as he loved his friends he loved his baby

brother more and it wasn't the kid's fault that both their parents were entitled assholes.

As he walked down the quiet, tree lined street Mickey felt a slight prickling feeling on the back of his neck similar to the one he had experienced after he'd left the house that morning.

He looked over his shoulder and felt a jolt as he saw the same old beat up green pick up from earlier going at a slow crawl down the street in the exact same direction he was heading.

Frowning, he re-adjusted his book bag and picked up his pace, keeping his eyes forward as he walked along. After a few seconds he turned and saw with a sinking feeling of dread that the truck had picked up speed equal to his own and was tailing behind him. He was still a few blocks away from his house and he had a feeling that if he tried to run the driver would put the pedal to the metal and overtake him.

There was a turn that led an alley ahead. He'd used it as a shortcut before and now was as good a time as any. He kept his brisk pace for a few moments and then seized the opportunity the moment it presented itself, turning suddenly and breaking out into a run down the gravel road. The driver of the truck hadn't anticipated this sudden move and screeched to a halt just as Mickey raced around the corner of the alley mouth. But still the car was faster than the human and even as Mickey ran down the alley he heard the distant but too near sounds of the pick up backing up and turning down the gravel road. Whatever the fuck was wrong with the driver Mickey didn't have time to think about. He looked wildly around for somewhere to hide and saw an empty wooden trash compartment behind a garage. He dove for it, scrambling into the tight space and sliding the front shut just as the pick up rounded the alley.

Mickey scarcely dared to breathe as he heard the heavy truck crunching over the gravel. He didn't want to think about why the hell this son of a bitch had gone after him and hoped beyond hope that it was all part of some Halloween prank. His back was getting cramped in the dark, tight space but he didn't move a muscle, keeping his eyes on the road through the narrowest crack in the side of the trash cubby.

He heard the sound of the door of the truck open and shut and the heavy footfalls of the driver crunching over the gravel slowly, clearly looking for him. Mickey squeezed his eyes shut, praying to God that the man would leave the alley and just let him go home.

The footsteps approached his hiding spot and stood for a full minute, right over top of the garbage box. All Mickey could hear was the sounds of heavy breathing but still he did not open his eyes.

Without so much as a grunt the man turned away from the cubby, returning back to the truck. The door opened and then slammed shut once again and a second later the engine turned over and the truck trundled down the alley, spraying rocks and dirt behind it as it went.

For a long while Mickey simply sat in the cubby, waiting for the sound of the truck's return but after a minute of silence he felt

safe enough to slide the door open and crawl out of the compartment. He dusted himself off and looked around, rubbing at the back of his sore neck. He felt weak in the legs both from having stuffed himself into the tight space and from lingering, numbing fear.

With shaking hands he pulled his iPhone out of his book bag, intending to call Sheriff Wallace and tell her what had happened. He glanced at the time at saw to his alarm that it was nearly four. The chase with the pick up had taken longer than he'd thought. His mother hadn't sounded patient on the phone and concern replaced Mickey's fear. He ran down the alley as fast as he could and rounded the corner, his mind filled with thoughts of home and making sure his little brother was alright.

He was so pre-occupied that he ran right passed the tall, dark white faced shape that stood in the shadow between two houses, watching the boy run with a curious tilt of his head.

13. Chapter 13

Michael didn't know what to make of the boy. He'd wanted to see him at his school, to watch him the way he'd watched Laurie when he'd come back to Haddonfield. If he hadn't been delayed by the sheriff he would have gotten the chance but the moment he'd seen her he'd felt once more a strange sense of recognition.

He knew this woman, but from where or when he couldn't tell at first. He'd kept to the outskirts of the cemetery, watching her enter with the old man. There was something about her that reminded him of Laurie, the way she determinedly faced things that would cause others to turn tail and flee.

For minutes he lingered in the shadows, wondering just who in the world she was and why he felt he'd seen her before. He searched through the darkest corners of his memory...something about a child, yes that was it. Had she been a friend of his?

No that wasn't quite right. She was far too young to have known him in the time before he'd murdered his sister. The child wanted to recall her, to put a name to the face but try as he might Michael could not remember who the determined woman was.

All the darkness knew was that she was now becoming slowly more aware of his presence in Haddonfield and that wasn't what he wanted, not just now. She needed to be taught a lesson, to know that he was just as aware of her as she was of him.

The pumpkin had been easy to procure. There were dozens and dozens lined up pathways to houses, their faces carved into jovial grins and demented leers. The groundskeeper had even carved a small cluster and left them to one side of the cemetery gate in the spirit of the holiday. It had only taken moments for him to walk out of the shadows and pick up the pumpkin with the sinister smile. It had surprised him somewhat to feel the stinging pain in his hand that resulted in his smashing the window of the woman's car. Never before had he experienced such a sharp sensation and he grit his teeth in frustration at the feeling, once again enraged that his own powerful body had betrayed him in such a pathetic way.

The knife had been the finishing touch, a clear message to the sheriff. He'd had it with him since leaving Canada but hadn't wanted to soil it with blood until the night came. The child had been giddy with anticipation as he'd crept back into the shadows and waited for the woman to return and find his little present for her.

In the split second between the woman's discovery and the mad scramble out of her vehicle Michael had felt compelled to don the mask, more out of a morbid desire to really frighten the sheriff.

Her eyes met his over the roof of the car.

And suddenly, inexplicably Michael knew who she was. Perhaps it was because of the childlike fear in her wide eyes but he suddenly recalled a bright eyed, brown haired little girl screaming as the boogeyman came towards them down the hall of the house where Laurie had been watching her two young charges.

There was no doubt in his mind that this woman before him was that same little girl, who wore the badge of lawmaker not as a costume but with dedication, a drive to keep her town safe from anything even remotely resembling him.

He left her, terrified and trembling, stripping the mask off and stowing it in the back pocket of his overalls once more, his skin tingling as the cool air played across his naked face.

Michael hadn't given any of the children he'd encountered a thought since that night. To him they were stupid but innocent lambs, surrounded by a herd of sheep too obsessed with their own desires to really look after the young things around them. He as the wolf could have his pick of the little ones far more easily but it was the older ones, the nubile ones that he craved. Children were too innocent and although he relished their fear it was more the boy in him being tickled pink that the other children were in such awe of him.

And now here the little girl was, all grown up and in a clear position to make things difficult for him. As he stalked the side streets and alleys of the town throughout the remainder of the day Michael thought about the other children that he had seen that day. There had been two boys, one whom had run smack into him after relentlessly tormenting another boy. Michael loathed bullies, found them to be nothing more than great cowards who tried to keep the world at bay by attacking it. He did not consider himself a bully. Bullies wanted perpetual victims and took gratification in their torment. Michael wanted his disposed of as swiftly as he could manage.

He wondered what had become of that frightened boy, if he had made something of himself the way the sheriff had or if he had become one of those pathetic people Michael had seen nursing a bottle of alcohol and bemoaning their life.

He thought too about the other boy, the one who had been in Laurie's care that night, who had told her that the boogeyman was coming for them. What had become of him? As he stood on the street across from the diner where he'd collected his mask Michael felt for the first time a strange immensity of all that had happened in his life, of how much time had truly passed...of time in general. It wasn't something

he thought about, although since he'd left Canada he had definitely come to understand his own age and had started to truly appreciate the fact that although he was still possessed of immense tenacity to extinguish whatever life happened to catch the darkness within he wasn't going to live forever. Old age would claim him if something else didn't.

He watched the blonde boy all throughout that afternoon, gazing at him across the long distance between the trees and the diner. He felt once more compelled to wear his mask, only for a moment, to gauge the boy's reaction. Laurie had been unnerved when he'd watched her through the window of her school all those years ago and impulsive nostalgia had made him want to see if the boy reacted the same way but he hadn't. Just a momentary sense of shock followed by annoyance.

Michael wasn't the same boogeyman to these children that he had once been. He kept a careful, albeit distant vigil over the boy, still feeling that remarkable, unexplainable pull towards him, as though the child inside had come across somebody he could have as a new playmate.

Michael had lived too long for the thrill of the hunt to pay much heed to that inner yearning, but still it made him curious. This boy, he seemed to have a strong core of friends had something in him that piqued the killer's interest. He tested the boy, to see how he would react under duress. Laurie had proven her mettle that night although somewhere in its bitter resentment the darkness still chalked that up to sheer dumb luck and Samuel Loomis' meddling.

It had been such a treat to pursue him, the child clapping with delight at how afraid the boy become as Michael trailed him in the truck he had stolen. But the evil had been somewhat impressed. The boy had managed to catch Michael off guard for the briefest moment, a moment that had given him enough time to hide himself. Of course Michael had stumbled upon that spot after only a second's confusion but he wasn't out for the boy's blood...not yet at least. In the same way Loomis had wanted to delicately probe Michael's seemingly blank mind at Smith's Grove Michael wanted to see how far the boy could be pushed before he turned confrontational much in the way Laurie had at that school of hers.

Now, as Michael watched the boy toddle down the street with a small child in an astronaut costume he had to admit that there was a similarity between him and Laurie, a fierce devotion to those around him, although he had yet to see how the boy behaved around his parents. He seemed to have completely forgotten about the chase through the alley in the presence of the little boy. His eyes shone brightly at the child and Michael felt the most minuscule twinge of jealousy in the pit of his stomach. Why hadn't his sister ever looked at him with that kind of devotion? It had been so long that Michael had completely forgotten if she had ever truly displayed an ounce of love for him. Surely as a baby she must have. The child within in was watching the boy and his brother with a sad hungriness. He wanted that, wanted somebody to look out for him, to be the absolute core of somebody's world! Why couldn't they all-his sister, Loomis, Laurie-why couldn't they have just loved him!?

His hand clenched tightly around a tree branch but he was no longer strong enough to snap it. It would not have been a wise decision. The

street, gradually settling into a dusky twilight, was becoming more and more crowded with trick-or-treaters of an older age. The noise would have given him away.

The little boy stopped in the middle of the street and rubbed at his eyes with tiny fists. The older boy, still costumed like a clown, bent down and rustled his brother's hair. The child climbed into the boy's arms and wrapped his hands around his neck and all at once they turned back down the street and headed for their home.

And Michael, watching this tender exchange from behind a large, parked van was all at once filled with a rushing, searching loneliness, a result of the innocent child inside wanting to share in such things again. Stretching his hand out he opened his mouth as though to call out to them, bring them back and beg to be taken home with them where he could be free from a lifetime of shadows and blood and death.

But the evil was too overpowering. It had existed in him far longer. It swallowed the child up once again and suppressed his desires for family and friends. His age and subsequent faltering grip on that darkness were to blame. The sky was darkening as the sun sank below the horizon, and lights were flickering on in the houses in Haddonfield. Night was fast descending on the town and night was Michael's time, his stronghold. The darkness was all at once around him and within him and in it he would be unstoppable once more. But there was still some daylight left and until he could prowl safely through the darkness he wanted to goad the boy just once more, to see what he would do if his very place of safety were threatened.

Once they both were out of sight Michael left his hiding spot, blending in amongst the Halloween revellers, his mind set determinedly on his purpose. The boy had proven himself quite adept this far but if he did not pass Michael's final test...well...there were plenty of other people in Haddonfield to have his pick of.

14. Chapter 14

The house had been empty when Mickey had arrived home, out of breath and still shaken from his little chase with the wacko in the pick up truck. The television had been on in the living room and he fully expected to find his mother making a mad dash the second he got through the front door but to his horror the only person in the house was Dexter, sitting on the couch and eating goldfish crackers from a little plastic bowl, his eyes glued on the cartoon in front of him. He looked around as Mickey entered and let out a high pitched trill at the sight of his brother.

"Mousey!"

"Hey little man," Mickey said as he set his book bag on the dingy room table, "where'd Mom take off to?"

"Work," Dexter replied, munching on more goldfish.

Mickey froze, fury rising in his veins. That fucking bitch hadn't had the decency to wait ten minutes for him? Taking out her trumped up frustrations on him was one thing but to leave her youngest child

home alone was downright irresponsible. Mickey had half a mind to go down to his mother's stupid little office himself and smash her face into the surface of her meticulously polished glass desk until either it or her skull broke.

Dexter looked back at him over the couch, his green eyes round as he seemingly took in Mickey's costume for the first time. "Are you mad Mousey?"

Mickey gave his brother a smile and plopped himself down on the couch beside him. "Nah I'm not mad kiddo," he said, fussing with Dexter's shirt. His brother giggled and shoved Mickey's hand away. Truth be told Mickey was furious but it wouldn't do any good to let Dexter see that. Out loud he asked his brother, "Wanna go get some candy?"

"Candy!" Dexter practically shouted and began bouncing excitedly in his seat. "Lots and lots of candy!"

"Yeah and then I can pick up after you when you get a tummy ache," Mickey said teasingly but that did little to dampen Dexter's spirits. He continued to squeal excitedly and Mickey, unable to help it, smiled warmly at his brother, opening his arms for a hug which Dexter happily gave him.

Fifteen minutes later Dexter was dressed in a little astronaut costume and Mickey was stooped down, holding his brother's tiny hand as he lead him to the houses on their street. It was gradually becoming darker outside and there were more and more kids trick or treating with their parents, going from house to house with pillow cases or plastic jack-o-lanterns to be filled with candy.

It warmed Mickey to see his brother having so much fun and even though his eye still throbbed and he was still royally pissed at his mother for being so careless he had only to look at Dexter's smiling face and hear his laugh as somebody doled candy into his little pail to forget what a complete pair of irresponsible assholes his mother and father were. Tonight was about him and his brother and they were doing perfectly fine as they continued down their street together.

At dusk Dexter stopped in the middle of the sidewalk and rubbed at his eyes tiredly.

"Wanna go home now little man?" Mickey said. Dexter gave a sleepy nod and without a word crawled into Mickey's arms, wrapping his arms around his big brother's neck and nodding off into Mickey's shoulder as he walked them down the dark street. He didn't wake up even when Mickey had to balance him with one arm when he unlocked the front door.

It was almost dark now. As Mickey gently deposited his sleeping baby brother onto the couch he glanced out the window to the street beyond. The lamps were fluttering to life, casting their amber glow over the steady parade of Halloween revellers. The glowing faces of jack-o-lanterns twinkled at him from the houses across the street, flickering in the gentle breeze of the cool autumn night. Mickey lingered in front of the window for a moment, feeling somewhat calmed by the serene quality of it all. If it were just him and Dexter his life would be perfect. He took far better care of his brother than

either of his parents did.

With a heavy sigh Mickey pulled himself away from the window and as quietly as possible pried Dexter's little tub of candy away from him. Neither of his parents would be sober enough to check his brother's candy when they came home, assuming they didn't pass out at the party. Flicking on the light in the kitchen he sat down at the table and started sorting through the miniature bars of chocolate and plastic baggies of candy corn, throwing the ones with the smallest hole or tear into the trash. It was oddly relaxing work and he hummed to himself, feeling strangely at ease doing such a menial task.

He'd been at it for only five minutes when a noise from the living room made his veins turn to ice. Dexter was screaming and crying at the top of his little lungs. Without another thought Mickey dropped the peanut butter cup he'd been checking over and dashed into the living room, looking wildly around for whatever it was that had upset his brother.

He hadn't bothered turning the lights on when they'd arrived home. The only light came from the glow of the television which he'd left on just in case Dexter had happened to wake up. As Mickey rounded the couch to his sobbing brother he glanced at the screen and grimaced. The Legend of Sleepy Hollow was playing. Obviously Dexter had woken up, seen the intense chase sequence between the Headless Horseman and Ichabod Crane and been spooked. With a flick of the remote Mickey changed the channel to a cooking show.

"It's okay buddy," he said as he scooped Dexter up off the couch and let him bury his tear stained face in his neck. "It's just a dumb cartoon." But Dexter was still crying hysterically and with him at such a close proximity to his ears Mickey could finally discern what it was that his brother was saying.

"Boogeyman! Boogeyman!"

Frowning Mickey turned around to stare at the front hall but there was nothing there. Dexter let out a scream and sobbed even harder to Mickey's shoulder. Whatever it was that was scaring him was outside the window...

Once more Mickey looked around and jumped at the sight of a tall, broad man standing just in front of the window in the shadow of the house, the black, gaping eyes of his mask boring into Mickey's. Once again he felt a rush of fury and, setting Dexter on the floor still sobbing he marched to the front door, threw it open and stormed over to the man, who turned his head curiously to stare at him.

"Hey thanks a lot asshole!" He stormed at the bastard who simply stood there in silence. "Really gets your rocks off, scaring little kids doesn't it? Well you know what fuck-face? You've got three seconds to get your ugly mug off my property or I'm caving your skull in!" It was something of an empty threat. The sheer size of the man alone was enough for Mickey to keep at least a few yards between them. But if the bastard wanted to keep running around town dressed in that costume then Mickey was going to make sure that he left his property with at least a compound fracture or two.

"One," Mickey said with emphasis. The man didn't move. "Two..." Still he stood, staring at Mickey with empty eyes. "Th-" Mickey barely had

time to finish the word before the man stepped off, turning away from the house and stalking off to the dark street, peeling his mask as he went. "Not so scary without that thing are you?" Mickey muttered to himself as he watched the man's retreating form. With an annoyed sigh he went back inside, locking the door behind him.

Dexter had crawled onto the couch and was watching the cooking show with half open eyes. His face was still red and stained with tears and Mickey wished that the prankster had stuck around just so he could make the bastard pay for having scared his little brother so badly.

"Come on buddy," he said, picking Dexter up. "Bed time for you."

Dexter nodded sleepily and much to Mickey's relief he was fast asleep by the time they got to his bedroom. Usually Dexter liked to have a warm bath before bed but trick or treating had tired him out. So, leaving him in his Halloween costume, Mickey tucked him into his bed, kissed him on the forehead and left the night light on. Just before he went back into the hall he paused at the door and watched his brother sleep for a moment.

"Being tired trumps being scared when you're young," he said to himself with a grin.

He busied himself with his homework as he sat in front of the television. With Dexter soundly asleep he was at liberty to watch whatever he chose and eventually settled on an old black and white haunted house movie, glancing up from his physics notes whenever he heard something that caught his interest. It was dull work and more often than not he caught himself tuning into the movie more. He needed as many as distractions possible. The day as a whole had been a complete and total whirlwind and burying himself in work or schlocky movies was a way of keeping his mind off his anger at his parents and whatever jitters remained from having been chased by the truck and telling off the bastard who'd scared Dexter.

The movie was typical fifties camp, with buxom blondes in elegant white nightgowns, dashing heroes and sinister villains who spouted ridiculously over the top quips. As he sat, enrapt during an extended chase scene through the catacombs of the old castle where the film was set, his stomach gave a loud gurgle. He hadn't eaten since that afternoon at the diner and even though he'd gorged himself on his hamburger, fries and soda he was a growing boy and food was a priority.

He went into the kitchen and had just decided to heat up a pan of popcorn when there was a loud knock at the door that made him jump. He thought of the man who had been outside in the Michael Myers mask. Had he come back to avenge his bruised ego? Before Mickey knew why he seized a large, sharp knife off of the counter, the very same one he'd touched that morning, and crept to the front door, keeping the knife behind him in case it was an innocent trick or treater. His parents had been insistent that they not dole out candy this year, saying that they wanted to save money.

Mickey firmly believed that they just wanted to have cash on hand for the copious amount of booze they would be drinking at their stupid party.

For half a moment he waited with his hand in the knob...then he wrenched the door open and instantly felt completely stupid for having been gripped by such ridiculous paranoia.

It was Curtis, waiting expectantly on the front step, still in his gladiator costume. Behind him on the dark street Mickey saw the SuperBee parked, the roof up. Inside he could just make out the shadowy forms of Laney, Pierce and Vanessa.

"Hey," Curtis said with a smile, "ready to go?"

"Go where?" Mickey asked him as he stealthily set the knife on the small table by the door.

Curtis looked as confused as Mickey felt. "To the dance. It's after six. We waited a little to see if you'd show up yourself."

"Oh shit!" Mickey spat. He'd completely forgotten to tell his friends that his mother had thrown a wrench in their plans. He felt the rage at her selfishness return all over again, the unfairness of her behaviour. His hand jerked out for the nearby knife again but before he could seize it Curtis' voice cut through his wrath, severing his tie to that dark impulse.

"You...you can't go can you?" He looked so disappointed that Mickey took a step towards him, wanting to reach out and comfort him. That impulse he restrained as well, albeit with more difficulty. "I guess I just thought since you were dressed up..."

Mickey looked down at himself and realized that since coming home from trick or treating with Dexter that he hadn't changed out of his clown costume. He hadn't even taken the mask out of his book bag. He had had the common sense to wipe off Vanessa's bad make up job before he'd left though.

"I, uh, didn't have time to change," he said lamely.

"Why can't you come with?"

"Mommie Dearest decided to run for parent of the year and leave Dexter home alone while she cut out to get trashed with my old man early," he said bitterly.

An ugly expression of anger passed over Curtis' face, just as it had that morning when he'd seen Mickey's bruise. He called Mickey's mother something so vile that it made Mickey smile in disbelief.

"Couldn't agree with you more," he replied. "Look I'm really sorry...like, you have no idea how much this sucks for me but I am not leaving him home alone for anything."

Curtis smiled. In the light streaming from the house Mickey saw the other boy's brown eyes shine with warmth at him and he suddenly felt his restraint on his desire to be closer falter somewhat, but still he did not move.

"Course you wouldn't," he said. "That's what's so damn great about you Mickey. You're more loyal than a labrador."

"I'll take that as a compliment," Mickey said, feeling his ears burn at the remark.

Curtis sighed, looked back at the car and said, "It's gonna suck the meat not having you there tonight clown boy" Then, suddenly remembering something he added, "Wait right here for a sec. There's something I was gonna give you after school but I guess you were too pissed off to hear me calling you."

He jogged back to his vehicle and returned half a second later, holding a small plastic jar. "Bruise ointment," he explained as he unscrewed the lid. "Coach gives it to us whenever we get banged up too badly. Here lemme help," and with that he strode forward, right into Mickey's personal space, swiped a smear of yellow paste from the jar, and dabbed at Mickey's purple bruise.

Mickey hissed when Curtis' fingers pressed against the area around his eye too hard.

"M'sorry!" Curtis said instantly and he was more gentle as he continued to apply the ointment. Mickey stood there, frozen, in a kind of stupor, his eyes never once looking away from Curtis' face, his whole mind numb. This kind of contact wasn't entirely unlike him. There had been a few times in the past when Curtis had shown he didn't find touching or being so close to Mickey awkward at all and Mickey didn't know whether or not it was because Curtis liked being close to him or if he just didn't think much of personal space. Being an athlete meant he had to have something of a disregard for it but still...Mickey had never seen Curtis act this way with anyone, except of course Vanessa.

"There," he said after he'd covered all of the bruise. "Keep it on overnight and it should be good by tomorrow."

"Thank you," Mickey said gratefully.

Curtis laughed softly and reached his hand out, pushing Mickey's bangs out of his eyes.

He'd never done that before.

Their eyes met for a long, drawn out moment. The wind picked up, pushing Mickey hair back over his eyes.

The sound of a car horn made them both look around.

"GET TOGETHER!" Laney shouted, leaning out the window. "KISS EACH OTHER!"

Mickey rolled his eyes.

"Don't let me keep you from the fun," he said. "I'm not worth it."

"Yeah," Curtis said, "you actually kind of are." He smiled and before Mickey knew what was happening Curtis pulled him in for a brief hug. Then he turned and walked down the steps and back towards the SuperBee.

Mickey watched as the car drove down the road and out of sight. For a moment Mickey stood there, looking at the dark street without really seeing anything. Then he turned around and closed the door, shutting out the darkness and the silence. The wind picked up once more. Across the street the light from a jack-o-lantern sputtered in the breeze, flickered back to life for the briefest of moments and finally died, the light extinguished in one swift, cruel second.

15. Chapter 15

Lindsey had gone to Principal Winters after leaving Tommy's classroom. The woman was tall, with short grey hair and tired, steely blue eyes. She'd been pleased to see Lindsey again but when the sheriff had told her that she wanted to speak with Mickey Morris the woman had returned to her empty handed.

"He has a free period after lunch Sheriff," she said. "You'll be hard pressed to be able to speak with him until school is out."

"Great," Lindsey sighed wearily and figured that, under the circumstances, she was needed on her beat more than she was with Mickey. He hadn't encouraged her interference ever but after seeing that carving he'd made in art class she was more determined to talk to him than ever.

"Would you like me to leave a message for him?" Principal Winters asked but Lindsey shook her head. There was always tomorrow, although as she left the quiet school she realized with some resignedness that the longer she let things boil at the Morris household the more likely there was to be an explosion.

She walked to the station from the high school. It wasn't a long journey, certainly not as long as it had been walking all the way over from the cemetery. It was a good chance too for her to keep her eyes out, watchful just in case Michael chose to show himself again but there was nothing in the brief walk, nothing but excited children and teenagers, most of whom were already costumed.

Solitude, she'd long ago concluded, was the best way for a law enforcer to live their life. She'd seen too many men and women on the force in Chicago lose their loved ones and been destroyed by it and if it wasn't that then it was the complete opposite, with widows and widowers of police officers left to pick up the pieces on their own, to soldier on with their broken, devastated family's.

Leigh Brackett had been Haddonfield's own prime example of that to her at a very early age. The man had never recovered from Annie's death and although a fire of hatred for Michael Myers had burned in him it had only been a matter of years before he'd shifted the blame onto himself. In his mind he hadn't been a cautious enough sheriff. The stages of grieving were long on those who lost a child. Lindsey wasn't even so sure that the man had recovered before he'd retired.

It was better for her to be alone. Haddonfield was all the husband, child and friend that she needed and she would protect it to her last breath.

The station was once more buzzing with activity when Lindsey returned shortly after one in the afternoon. News of the smashed tombstone and jack-o-lantern in her cruiser had made it's way back there by that point and although people inquired of her left, right and centre she only told them what she'd told the officers she'd called in to process both scenes: sick practical jokes done by thoughtless teenagers.

Before another question could come her way she locked herself in her office and, before sinking wearily into her chair, pulled the blinds shut, not liking how open and exposed the windows overlooking the training grounds made her feel.

"Teenagers," she muttered to herself in disgusted disbelief. Many of the senior staff and even those younger than she was always jumped to that conclusion. She had to admit that those of a certain young age had more of a habit of breaking the rules, Brent Elamb and his brothers being a prime example, but she worked her damndest to make sure she herself didn't go pinning every cat up a tree on Haddonfield's youth. Teenagers were moody and rowdy yes but in her experience their crimes were mostly petty, at least in a small town. They were experimenting with life, getting a taste of independence, breaking through that yolk of simply being told not to, wanting to know why they couldn't. Most of them grew out of it.

And then there were those like Alan and Olivia Morris who grew into something worse. Lindsey trusted a facetious adult less than she trusted some snot-nosed teenager making a ruckus.

But the smoke screen would have to suffice. As long as she kept herself and the town calm then she could focus on finding Michael and doing something about him.

But what? What was the son of a bitch after?

"Look to the past," she told herself. It had been a mantra drilled into her head during police academy. In the worst case scenario it helped to look at a criminal's past, to find a pattern, some kind of method to their monstrosity and at this point Lindsey would take any kind of clue, no matter how frivolous.

She picked up her phone and called the secretary.

"Jessica," she said, "what I'm about to say stays between us you got it?"

"Sure thing boss, what's up?"

Lindsey took a deep breath. "I need you to pull all the files we have on Michael Myers and have them on my desk in the next minutes. You got it?"

Jessica laughed. "What for?"

"Because I'm writing a book!" Lindsey said sharply. "It doesn't matter just get them to me alright? And have the lieutenant take over my spot for the day." She hung up the phone and ran a hand through her hair, pulling the tie out of her ponytail and shaking it out. It was a habit when she was particularly overwhelmed and now more than definitely qualified as one of those times.

Jessica had the files on her desk in seven minutes, a record for her. Lindsey pulled her lunch out of the small fridge she kept in her office and began to comb through the dusty old files.

It was all things she'd heard before. The murder of Judith when he was six, the escape from Smith's Grove, the murders of Annie Brackett, Lynda van der Klok and Bob Simms and his relentless massacre at Haddonfield Memorial, all in an attempt to get to Laurie. It was after four when she was finished with the files and Lindsey felt exhausted and even more hopeless than when she'd opened the case file.

There was nothing, absolutely nothing to suggest method or motive, beyond the man's desire to wipe his whole family out. That of course had been Michael's terrifying enigma. There was nothing to suggest what had made him such a violent, unstoppable force and as a result Lindsey had no idea what he would do now.

Not even the file on the Hillcrest Academy murder helped her. The only real thing she gleaned from her research was the one thing most people already knew: Michael for some reason wanted to be an only child and had hunted Laurie down after learning of her survival, determined to finally kill her.

Too bad she didn't get to him first, Lindsey thought bitterly as she gazed down at an old photograph of Laurie on the inside of the folder. Fate was on the maniac's side. He'd been able to slip away. Laurie's death several years later had been attributed to one of the inmates and it infuriated Lindsey to know that such a fierce survivor like her old babysitter had met her end at the hands of a certified lunatic.

The only comfort in it was that it hadn't been Michael who had gotten her.

All of his family was gone, his old home was no more...as Lindsey stared at the clutter of pages and old photographs on her desk as night settled outside she came to the infuriating conclusion that she simply didn't and would never know.

"Stop it," she told herself sharply.

She'd been attacking this from the wrong angle. She didn't want to create some kind of profile to understand Michael by. She didn't know anybody who would willingly delve into that kind of darkness. She was a police officer, not a psychologist. What she needed was a weak point, an Achilles heel to be able to lure him out.

She wasn't his family so she could rule that out.

Lindsey rifled through the file again. Many of his victims, like Annie and most especially Lynda, had been found in states of romantic entanglement. Lindsey grimaced at that notion and swiftly axed it. There were many things she would do in the name of justice but getting herself involved with somebody for the sake of baiting a killer wasn't one of them.

She glanced at the clock and saw to her shock that it was after six. She hadn't been paying attention, too invested in finding something,

anything on Michael that would help, to notice the passage of time.

"No," she told herself, wildly digging through the files, "no no no!" How could she have been so careless? Darkness was Michael's element, a time when he would be protected by the night, free to stalk undetected through the shadows. Even now he could be out there, pursuing innocent people and all because she'd let herself become preoccupied on the past.

As she left the quiet station, her mind a blaze of panic Lindsey determined to see Mickey first. Just to make sure that he was alright. And then she would patrol the streets, no matter how much gas it took, even in it meant staying awake until the crack of dawn and beyond. She wasn't going to let him hurt anybody in this town again.

Lindsey kept her eyes peeled on the sides of the streets and she drove to Mickey's house, but the only people she saw were those few young people who were out for a good time. She wanted to pull over, tell them to get the hell inside and stay there until morning but she knew they wouldn't listen to her. If there was one thing she'd learned from Tommy's books it was that people didn't want to believe in evil again if it tore them from complacency. They'd think she was trying to stir up trouble.

The living room light was on in Mickey's house as Lindsey pulled up. She dashed to the front door, oblivious to the chill of the wind. She knocked and waited for half a moment in which she looked up and down the street just to make sure. But there was nothing, not even a jack-o-lantern out of place.

Mickey was wearing a black and white clown costume when he answered the door, looking wary at the sight of her.

"Look Sheriff," he said, sounding as exhausted as she felt, "my folks aren't home right now. But if it gets me a crime stopper tip they might be driving drunk. Hey I've never seen you with your hair down before. You look good."

"Cute," Lindsey said, disturbed by how shaken her voice was. "I just wanted to see how things were before I...well before I started my patrol."

"Let's see," Mickey said dryly, "my father pulled on Ike Turner on me again this morning, my mom decided it would be perfectly kosher to leave my little brother home alone...oh and then of course some sicko dressed like Michael Myers decided to scare the hell out of Dexter about an hour ago."

Lindsey stared at him, her mind numb, praying that he had only seen another stupid jokester. "Mickey what...what exactly did this man look like?"

Mickey looked at her flatly. "Like Michael Myers."

"Was he tall Mickey?"

"And broad," Mickey said, frowning as he remembered. "Not fat, y'know, but like...he was just huge. Took off after I told him to get

bent. Course it wasn't the first time I'd seen him."

Lindsey glanced around, suddenly aware of how out in the open she was keeping herself and Mickey by having this conversation out on the front step this way. "Can I come in for a minute? I just want to ask a few more questions."

Mickey gave her a quizzical stare and for a moment she expected him to refuse but he nodded and held the door open for her.

"You said you saw this guy before?" Lindsey asked as she closed the door behind them.

"Yeah," Mickey said. "I was at the diner with my friend and I saw this guy in that stupid costume watching us from across the parking lot." He thought for a moment and added, "Come to think of it both those guys were pretty huge. Hey Lindsey you don't think it was the same guy do you?"

Lindsey couldn't speak. She was breathing heavily, once again feeling like a cornered, frightened little girl. Nobody could impersonate the size of Michael Myers and from the way Mickey described it the person who had been watching him throughout the day was no teenager in a costume. Could Michael really have set his sights on the lanky, sandy haired boy in front of her?

"Don't worry about it Lindsey," Mickey told her, obviously having taken notice of her silence. "If you wanna worry about anything worry about that nut ball from Canada with the pick up."

Lindsey stared at him, her eyes wide, the blood draining from her face. No...this wasn't happening. It couldn't be, not to Mickey. He'd already been through so much he didn't need Michael trying to add him to his slough of innocent victims.

"This big ugly green pick up just about took the front off of Curt's car this morning," Mickey continued, his eyes on her, his expression drawn at her loss of colour. "And then after school the sicko driver chased me down an alley! I had to hid in a freaking garbage bin!" He paused and looked closer at her. "Hey you okay Lindsey? You look kinda...spooked."

Lindsey didn't reply at first. She walked from the hall into the living room and stood in front of the window, her arms wrapped around her body, staring at the dark street. She felt cold all over, more scared than she'd been in over two decades but underneath that fear the mother bear arose in her, that fierce desire to protect smothering her fear.

Michael wanted Mickey and out of all the people Lindsey knew Mickey was the one she could stand to see made a victim of the least. He deserved better than having Michael make his life even more of a hell than it already was. Besides, here was a perfect opportunity lure Michael out. She felt stupid for not having seen it before when she was going through the files.

Babysitting. It had been the most common link between a majority of his victims.

"Mickey," she said quietly after a moment of deep thought, "I need

you to do me a very big favour."

"What is it?"

She turned to face him, her expression hard. "I need you to let me babysit your brother for the rest of the night."

Mickey stared at her, a disbelieving smile on his lips. "Are you on thorazine or something?"

"No," Lindsey told him sharply. "I can't explain it to you right now but I wouldn't be asking you this if it wasn't important. So please...can I watch Dexter? At least until your folks come home?"

He stared at her, long and hard and then slowly, as though stealing himself, nodded. "Alright," he said, still obviously thinking that she was off her rocker, "alright. But what am I going to do?"

He needed to be somewhere with lots of people, somewhere that Michael wouldn't be able to get to him without drawing attention to himself.

"There's a dance at the school right?"

Mickey nodded. "Well I mean it's gonna be over at like nine," he said, "but I was supposed to be on the cleanup."

"There you go then," Lindsey told him. "Just promise me you'll stay in a group?"

"What's all this about Lindsey?"

"Never mind," she told him hastily. "Anything I should know about Dexter?"

"He's asleep," Mickey said. "Uh, if he wakes up and gets fussy just give him some apple juice from the fridge. And there's graham crackers in the cupboard over the sink."

Lindsey went into the kitchen, just to make sure that the back door was secured. She was about to tell Mickey that he should wake up his brother so she could give him a lift to the dance when she heard the front door open and close.

Lindsey dashed into the living room and to her horror saw that it was empty. She wrenched the front door open and half-jogged down the stairs, calling his name as she went.

"Mickey wait!" But he was almost out of sight, walking briskly down the street, his head bowed low. Lindsey watched him go with a sinking feeling. She hadn't anticipated his impulses getting in the way of her plan and had half a mind to get into the cruiser and drag him back but now that she was in charge of the slumbering little boy upstairs she wasn't about to leave him alone for a second.

She went back into the Morris household, and locked the door behind her. Resignedly she went to the kitchen, found the coffee maker and started a fresh brew. It was going to be a long night, one that she would see through to the very end. Even though Mickey was no longer

home Lindsey hoped that Michael would come calling, just to check on the boy he was targeting. She could get him if he did that.

For the first time in her life Lindsey Wallace wanted the boogeyman to come and get her.

16. Chapter 16

He walked slowly down the dark streets of Haddonfield, his mask pulled securely over his face, restricting his vision to what was in front of him. The wind was dying down but the chill of the night air remained. It did little to stop his progress. He knew where he must go and nothing, not even the deathly silence was going to make him turn around. Halloween night had in many ways ended early on the streets of the town but the lights glowing from the houses and what few jack-o-lanterns that had not been snuffed out by the earlier wind told him that in the safety of their homes the night was just beginning for many of the citizens.

And for him it had yet to begin.

He walked comfortably through the night, over old haunts and pathways, barely taking notice of the few costumed fun seekers who remained outside, hooting and hallooing as they went in search of a more devilish fun. He walked down streets and over the deserted intersection where he'd had his earlier encounter and on, up a gradual slope, passed shops and convenience stores, up to the dark grounds of the high school where so much had taken place.

The lights in the lower level were on, pools of bright light cascading down onto the green of the sloping front lawn and it's stark grey parking lot. There were still many vehicles parked in the stalls and as he stood just beyond the light's touch he saw a steady trickle of young people, all in costumes, leaving through the front doors, laughing and shaking their heads as they made their way to their respective cars.

Two in particular caught his attention, two who did not make for any vehicles, but instead began walking the perimeter of the school, their hands clasped tightly, talking low, a familiar gleam in their eyes. He watched until they disappeared around a corner before he stealthily followed, keeping as close to the shadows as possible.

He could still see them even at his cautious distance, giggling as they walked towards a cluster of high shrubs near a dark nook of the building. Quietly he crept forward, hidden by the bushes and peered through at them, breathing heavily but not loud enough so as to give away his presence.

The girl giggled as she pulled the ties out of her blonde pigtails, shaking her hair back as she straddled the powerfully built boy who was sitting on a low stone wall. Completely unaware that they were being observed they seemed uninhibited, the boy's hands sliding up the back of the girl's legs and cupping her rear just under the hem of her skirt.

They leaned in for a kiss.

He burst out of the bushes.

"BOO!" Mickey shouted as he leapt at Vanessa and Curtis. Vanessa screamed and toppled off her boyfriend and into a small, half dead shrub. Curtis got to his feet in an instant, his expression tense and challenging at the intrusion. Then, seeing who it was he gave Mickey an ugly glower which Mickey returned by sticking out his tongue. He pulled his mask up over his hair and reached a hand out to Vanessa who was already half standing and, in spite flushing with alarm and embarrassment, laughing at the little joke, looking more pleased to see him at the party than anything.

"You totally suck!" She giggled, giving him a playful swat on the arm. Curtis was still standing there looking miffed at having been broken apart when he was so near making a score with his girlfriend. Mickey, knowing full well that the other boy couldn't stay mad forever, instantly decided to goad him just a little further.

"You're gonna tear a hole in your subligaculum there," he told with a serious tone. Curtis glanced down at the obvious bulge in the skirt of his gladiator costume. He didn't even blush as he looked back up at Mickey who was grinning as he stood there with an equally smiling Vanessa.

"Wait you know what it's called?" Curtis demanded hotly and Mickey couldn't help but let out a whoop of laughter at his best friend's obliviousness. "Yes I know what it's called," he said teasingly, unable to prevent himself from grinning like an idiot. "I mean I have one so-"

"I wasn't talking about that, dick!" Curtis said hotly. He took a deep, calming breath and shook his head. "You know what? Never mind. If anyone needs me I'll be in the locker room melting pearls on my stomach." And with that he turned and walked away, hobbling awkwardly due to the lump in the front of his costume.

"Don't make a mess!" Mickey called out after him. He really couldn't help it. He was just so damn happy to actually be here with his friends after such a disappointing evening. He'd really have to thank Lindsey the next time he saw her, although even now as he stood in the light of the school with Vanessa he still couldn't help but feel unnerved slightly by the sheriff's behaviour. He'd never seen her that on edge before and he wondered if the Elam boy's Michael Myers prank had gotten out of hand somehow. Brent and his brothers weren't violent unless provoked so Mickey didn't really see why Lindsey was so tense about them. Perhaps it had been his news about being chased by that deranged truck driver from Canada. Was she afraid that the driver was going to come back?

Mickey shook the thought off. Lindsey was keeping watch over his house and more importantly his brother. He wanted to have fun for once and not have to worry about the weight of his life.

"So how did you get out of babysitting Dexter?" Vanessa asked, hooking her arm under his as she led them back up to the front doors. "We were totally bummed when Curt said you weren't showing."

"Sheriff Wallace has decided that a career in childcare is more important than her actual job," Mickey told her.

"You're kidding?!"

Mickey shook his head. "Nope. I think she's having a mid-life or something. Not that it really bothers me anyway." As they passed the parking lot he frowned at the sight of even fewer cars than there had been when he'd walked by before. "The party can't be that boring can it?"

Vanessa rolled her eyes as they side stepped a group of chattering girls in sexy cat costumes. "There's some dumb bonfire at Riddle's Farm again so some people are cutting out early. I totally don't get it. They got busted doing that last year but that totally hasn't stopped anybody from going."

"Are we?" Mickey asked as they turned down the hall that led to the gymnasium and even from this distance he could hear the music blaring from within.

"Not a chance in hell," Vanessa replied with a grin. "Our party's going to begin after everyone leaves. Hopefully we can get Mr. Doyle out of our hair for a bit."

The gym lights were dim and Mickey had to admit that he was impressed with the decoration skills of the student union. Paper bats and ghosts covered the walls, black and orange streamers were hung from the ceiling and at various corners large decorative cobwebs stretched over the wall. The refreshment tables off to the side had been set up in fake graveyard, complete with foam tombstones and a cemetery backdrop. Perhaps the most impressive part of the display was the stage which had been set up with dummy werewolves, vampires, zombies and mummies. In the very centre of the stage a platform had been erected with electric jack-o-lanterns hiding the front from view and a hand painted haunted house background set up in behind. For added effect the lights in the gym had been dimmed and strobe lights were going off, casting multicoloured circles on the floor and the swarm of young people, all of them in costumes, who were moving to the music.

As they worked their way across the floor Vanessa pointed up at the ceiling. Looking up Mickey saw that a net had been secured across the roof, just under the large glass skylight. Myriads of orange and black balloons were secured in the netting.

"They're supposed to come down when they pick the costume contest winners," Vanessa said, her voice raised above the thudding music and noise of the crowd.

Mickey shook his head as they walked towards the refreshment table, not at all looking forward at having to clean up that aspect of the dance.

His stomach still empty, he helped himself to whatever snacks were available and stood chatting with Vanessa, who shared Curtis' sentiments about his mother when he told her that she'd gone and left Dexter home alone. He left out the parts about being chased by the pick up truck and seeing the man in the Michael Myers costume.

"Where'd Pierce and Laney take off too?" He asked her as the crowd

ceased dancing for the briefest moment as the song craned her head over the mass of gyrating bodies and pointed them out. Mickey looked around just in time to see his friends, who were moving together like one being. He also saw Mr. Doyle, sober suited like the rest of the staff, coming towards him.

"Good to see you showed up Mickey," he said as he helped himself to a candy apple.

"Good to hear you dropping the formalities," Mickey replied with a grin. To his surprise Mr. Doyle chuckled, shaking his head as though he didn't want to be amused but couldn't help it.

"I was hoping everyone else would be here by now," the art teacher said. "I wanted to go over some, uh, regulations for the clean up." Vanessa and Mickey exchanged evil grins at one another and to their amusement Mr. Doyle looked alarmed.

"Please don't make things difficult for me," he begged them. "I'm going to be the only responsible adult in the building tonight!"

"All the better for us then," Mickey quipped. Mr. Doyle glared at the both of them and then stalked off to stand in a corner and talk with the home economics teacher. The strobe lights went wild as a new song started and Mickey felt a rush of adrenaline. He wasn't much of a party animal but somehow he needed this after such a chaotic day.

Laney and Pierce extracted themselves from the crowd a few minutes later. They were both delighted to see Mickey at the party and as Laney gave him an excited hug Mickey noticed Pierce eyeing the refreshment table dubiously.

"Hungry?" Mickey asked him.

"Like the wolf." He replied. "Glad to see my twenty didn't go to waste. You look like a half burnt Pillsbury Dough Boy."

"I'm a clown," Mickey told him with a roll of his eyes. "And that's way better than an Albert Einstein with alopecia."

Pierce glared at him as he re-adjusted his wig and, still frowning he leaned closer to Mickey and said, "I'd have maybe one cup of punch if I were you. I saw Mrs. Ling over here earlier with a bottle of something."

Mickey gaped at him in surprise. Mrs. Ling was the often uptight librarian and it was common knowledge among the students that she had a liquor cabinet in the office of the library and she was known to be quite adamant that no student would be drinking liquor in her presence.

"I guess she was feeling generous," Laney said, taking note of the look on Mickey's face. "I wonder if it's any good..."

Wordlessly Mickey scooped up one of the plastic orange cups and ladled himself a generous supply of the pink liquid. He took a large gulp. It was typical fruit punch, fizzy and sweet but there was definitely something underneath it, something sharp that made his

blood rush and his brain spike for the briefest moment.

"Seems safe to me," he said with a laugh.

"What does?" Curtis asked as he appeared behind Vanessa. He eyed the cup in Mickey's hand and added, "Lemme guess...Ling let the liquor flow?"

"With distinction!" Mickey said and took another gulp. He felt his blood sing again and his brain began to hum. Curtis filled up a cup which he passed to Vanessa and Pierce and Laney both got their own each. Curtis wasn't going to drink Mickey knew. He was driving and that trumped getting buzzed.

"Come on kids," Mickey said after taking another gulp and giving the dance floor a hungry stare. "Let's dance."

Despite the handful of students who had left for the bonfire at Riddle's Farm, the dance showed no signs of slowing down. Music thrummed from the speakers as the lights played across the students who danced and moved in a primal need to cut loose.

Mickey's friends stayed close together, swaying and dancing and laughing as their frustrations were released on the dance floor. But Mickey still felt that same weight that was always present in his life. Even as he moved on the dance floor with his friends it wasn't enough to take his thoughts off of the pain in his eye, the rage at his parents and a strange, creeping sense of fear whose cause he could not place.

Vanessa, Laney and Pierce stopped after their first cup of punch but Mickey felt himself pulled back over to it, doling out more of the alcohol infused liquid. He returned to the dance floor, feeling that the edge was at least somewhat taken off with the second cup and by the time he'd finished it he was properly tipsy, swaying without an ounce of self-consciousness as the music continued to pound.

He went back for another cup of punch.

And then another.

The lights were blending together in front of his vision and his head felt light. His heart was pounding as meandered through the crowd, their masked faces swarming together in front of him, spinning whenever he turned to look for his friends. Someone grabbed him by the arm and pulled him towards them. Confused he saw Curtis' concerned face swimming before his vision. Behind him Vanessa, Laney and Pierce all wore similar looks of worry but Mickey only laughed and pushed through them. He needed to forget, to not have people worrying about him or his bruises. He just wanted to keep this feeling.

He went to the refreshment table a fifth time, stumbling among those students and faculty who remained. The punch bowl was nearly empty and his hands shook as he tried to ladle more juice into his cup.

A hand closed around his wrist as he brought the cup to his lips. He turned and saw Curtis who was shaking his head, wearing an expression that clearly said that he wasn't going to let Mickey have one more cup. Mickey jerked his hand away and brought the cup to his lips,

taking on gulp.

The cup was batted away from him, spilling punch all over the table. He whirled around, glaring at Curtis who held his gaze. Anger, sadness and shame rose in Mickey's chest at the same time that a particularly bass heavy song started. The strobes began to flash like lightning. Mickey turned and took a step towards the dance floor.

One second he was looking through his blurry vision at a sea of costumed teenagers dancing on the gym floor and the next he was lying flat on his back, staring up at the net on the ceiling that held the balloons.

There was somebody near by, somebody who was peeling something off of the wall, something that sounded papery. All at once Mickey was aware that the music had stopped and that the strobes had been shut off, leaving the gym in a state of dimness. His head began to pound and he did not trust his stomach if he moved so, still staring at the ceiling he said, "Why didn't the balloons come down?"

Curtis, who was standing on a small plastic step stool replied, "Something went wrong with the pulley system so we're gonna pull them down before we go and let the janitors deal with it in the morning."

"Oh..." He slowly tried to sit up and immediately toppled sideways into the wall. He saw spots and felt his bruise tingle as the blood rushed to his face. Curtis dropped what he was doing and crouched down next to Mickey who was leaning against the wall.

"M'sorry," he said, feeling like a total asshole for having caused such a scene. He couldn't even remember passing out.

"Don't worry about it," Curtis said softly.

"What time is it?"

"Nine-thirty," Curtis replied.

"Aw shit," Mickey moaned. "How much of the clean up have I missed?"

"Not a lot," Curtis told him. "Mr. Doyle went off to clear out the classrooms in case people decided to spend the night in school. Pierce and Laney...well it's not hard to imagine what they're doing. And Nessa outside to get some air. They've all been in radio silence for a bit."

"What?"

Curtis chuckled and pulled out a small walkie talkie. He clicked a button on the side and a static beep filled the air and made Mickey's brain scream in protest. He squeezed his eyes shut and slid against the wall, his head lolling to the side.

"Did...did I do anything stupid?" He asked, his eyes still closed.

"You mean besides drink about a gallon of liquored up punch?"

"Yeah besides that," Mickey groaned, once more feeling a prickle of shame.

"Not really," Curtis said. Mickey heard him shift and felt him move closer to him. He cracked his eye open and saw that Curtis was crouched down next to him. "There was something you said that kinda threw me off..."

"Great," Mickey muttered.

"You said that we all liked you better this way," the other boy said softly. "And that's bullshit Mickey. We all like you no matter what you are. Alright?"

Mickey sighed and nodded, feeling like the world's biggest asshole. "I'm so sorry Curt..." He said softly. He felt Curtis' hand ruffle his hair and he laughed softly. There was silence between them for a moment and then, before he could help it Mickey said, "I guess it just freaks me out...I...I don't know what's going to happen to us after school is over. Feel like I'll never see you guys again and it just...it scares me." It really did. Being left here in Haddonfield, trapped in that boiling house completely at the mercy of his father and mother and the darkness inside of him.

"I know what we're going to do," Curtis said softly. "We're going to get our diplomas, walk off that stage, get into my car and go somewhere safe and exciting."

"Those two things don't really go together," Mickey murmured. He was starting to feel sleepy.

"You feel safe with me right?" Curtis asked.

"Well yeah."

"Do I excite you?"

"Immensely."

Curtis laughed. "Well then there you go." Mickey heard him stand up. There was a soft thud next to him and Mickey knew that the other boy had put his walkie-talkie next to him. "I'm gonna get everyone together," Curtis told him. "I'll see if Mr. Doyle's cool with me taking you back to my place to crash. The rest of us can come back and finish cleaning up."

Mickey smiled, his eyes still closed.

"Try and sleep it off while I'm gone," Curtis continued. He turned but before he took so much as a step Mickey said quietly, "Why are you always so damn nice to me?"

Curtis paused for a moment and then said, "Because you need it. Get some sleep Mousey."

Mickey listened as Curtis' footsteps got steadily further away. The gym door opened and then closed and there was silence in the gym. Mickey slid further onto the floor, rolled over and was soon fast asleep.

He didn't even wake up when, several minutes later, the door to the gym quietly opened and shut again and another set of footsteps, heavier than Curtis', walked slowly towards him. The slumbering teenager shifted in his sleep but did not wake up, even as the intruder stopped in front of him, staring down with soulless eyes as he slept. For a moment the man watched him, wondering what to do. Then, after a minute of silent deliberation, the shape turned and walked back out of the gym, being careful to close the door as softly behind him as possible, leaving the gymnasium and the sleeping boy within silent as the grave.

17. Chapter 17

Tommy had kept a careful watch during the dance, keeping to the outskirts of the dance floor like the rest of the supervising staff and doing his best to break up the odd bout of unruliness. It wasn't something he particularly relished doing. Teenagers were teenagers and as far as he was concerned they should at least be allowed to make their own mistakes and learn from them.

Granted on tonight of all nights he really didn't think it was a good idea to let these young people get away with as much as he usually did. Thirty-five years of living with the shadow of Michael Myers had instilled Tommy with an involuntary sense of caution when it came to Halloween night. Living in Indiana for most of his adult life hadn't taken that sense away from him. He and Rachel had often butted heads over the advisability of letting Jamie go trick-or-treating when their daughter had been old enough.

He'd tried brushing it off on too much candy being bad for her and not liking the money they had to waste on the holiday but deep down Tommy feared that the boogeyman, his boogeyman would resurface and take the most precious thing in his world.

He needn't have feared Michael.

The world took both his wife and daughter from him.

Things between him and Rachel had fallen apart after the checks stopped being enough to keep them in the lifestyle he'd built for them and although they'd really tried to work things out it had been too late. Tommy guessed that Rachel had secretly been tired of sharing her life with somebody so obsessed with the thing that went bump in the night. She hadn't been an enormous fan of the comics despite her support and killing off the character he'd based on her in his second work in the trilogy hadn't exactly been endearing.

That of course was nothing compared to how livid she'd been when he'd written The Curse of Michael Myers. Rachel had never been able to separate their daughter with the character of Jamie Lloyd in his books, despite their Jamie being blonde and _his _Jamie having dark hair. When he had written in the subplot of Jamie having Michael Myers' child and subsequently being killed Rachel had phoned him in the middle of the night, telling him that he'd gone too far and that if he ever wanted contact with their child again to put the pen down and not write any further books.

Despite that there was still something between them, for which he was incredibly grateful. The years between his last comic has quelled their anger at each other and he was quite looking forward to spending Thanksgiving with Rachel and Jamie. In a way his desire to teach had come from wanting to be near people Jamie's age, to look after them the way Laurie had when she'd protected himself and Lindsey that night, to guide them the way he hadn't been able to guide Jamie through her teenage years.

Which was why, as he stood talking about nothing to those people on the faculty who didn't consider him a neo-hippie lunatic, he felt his heart sink when he noticed Mickey Morris stumbling over himself on the dance floor, a plastic cup in his hand.

"Aw shit," he muttered, glancing over at the bowl of punch on the refreshment table. As a member of the faculty it was his job to watch out for students trying to spike the juice bowl but Tommy knew the kids better than to think they'd stoop to something like that. Most of them would be getting trashed at the bonfire later and they needed their wits to drive there. He glowered at a dark corner of the gym where the short, stout, bespectacled form of Mrs. Ling sat, nursing what appeared to be a sports bottle that was most likely full of whatever the miserable woman had decided to dump in the punch.

Tommy watched Mickey out of the corner of his eye for a few more minutes. The boy had a remarkable group of friends and he felt that Mickey would be in good hands with them for the time being. But when the tipsy kid swaggered over to the punch bowl for a fifth time Tommy knew that it was time to step in, and better him than one of the other members of staff who would doubtless be less understanding.

Tommy had just drawn level with the table when Mickey toppled over and into the strong arms of Curtis Wryst, who wasted no time in slinging his drunk friend's arm over his shoulder. He looked around as Tommy approached and instantly his expression turned challenging at the sight of his teacher. Curtis wasn't violent unless pushed incredibly far but after four years of teaching him Tommy knew that when it came to people he cared for he would become a raging bull to defend them.

"It's nothing," he said mulishly, grimacing when Mickey crooked his head into Curtis' neck in a surprisingly affectionate way. "He just, uh, danced too hard."

"Cut the crap Curtis," Tommy said with a heavy sigh, stooping so he could throw Mickey's other arm over his shoulder. "Just leave him on one of the benches and keep an eye on him alright?" He cast a filthy look at Mrs. Ling as they passed but she was too liquored up at that point to care that her irresponsible actions had caused a student to pass out. Mickey was a good kid and Tommy could only guess what had made him want to keep gunning down the spiked punch, especially seeing as he knew full well that it was alcoholic.

Carefully he and Curtis set Mickey on a free bench. Loyally Curtis took the free space and didn't object when his friend's head lolled onto his lap. When Tommy had been a teenager that kind of thing was liable to get a kid punched out. He was inwardly thankful that in spite of their collective indifference the youth nowadays seemed more open to such notions of love. Mickey had nodded off by that time, his

shaggy hair falling over his eyes.

"I don't even have to tell you to watch him do I?" Tommy said, peering closer at the passed out kid. Was that a bruise over Mickey's eye or was it just the bad lighting?

Curtis gave him a flat stare and said, "No actually you don't." Tommy nodded and turned back to the crowd, muttering to Principal Winters that it would be a good idea for them to get a designated driver for Mrs. Ling, who was standing on the outskirts of the floor, dancing on her own.

The principal glared at the librarian and nodded.

It wasn't long after that the party began to break up, much to Tommy's relief. Most of the students were anxious to get to the bonfire and departed after the winners of the costume contest had been announced.

By ten to nine the music had stopped and the light show was over. Principal Winters asked the faculty to herd the remaining students out of the gym before she herself forcibly seized the now wobbling Mrs. Ling by the arm and marched her firmly out of the gym, showering the drunk woman with all sorts of well deserved abuse.

In all that time Mickey had not woken up. To Tommy's amazement Curtis had not left the boy's side, only pushing him off his lap to set him on the floor when his other friends joined them at the bench, all anxious to see how Mickey was doing. It was oddly touching to Tommy. He didn't regard the student body with the same icy caution that most of the staff did. He'd learned long ago that as selfish and sometimes irresponsible as teens could be they were also capable of great empathy. It was why he had made the central characters of his comics teenagers.

"We'll just leave him until he wakes up," Tommy told the other four as he handed out the walkie talkies they would be using. One for himself, one for Pierce and Laney who would be cleaning the stage and one for Curtis and Vanessa who had volunteered to clean up the decorations along the wall.

"They totally better be firing Mrs. Ling for this," Vanessa said bitterly.

Tommy laughed. "If Principal Winters lets her live long enough I'm positive that she won't be working here much longer. Now, I've got to do a classroom check and make sure that there's nobody trying to have a slumber party in the shop class. I should be back in about fifteen." He noticed that Pierce and Laney grinned at each other and before they could say a word he added, "Try not to burn the gym down while I'm gone alright?"

"Yes Mr. Doyle," they chorused in their best school children voices. Tommy rolled his eyes and headed out of the gym, turning on his walkie-talkie as he went.

The hallways were empty and quiet, the fluorescents chasing away the shadows and providing a gentle hum. It was relaxing to him as he checked the rooms, making sure that there weren't any students lingering behind doing things they weren't supposed to be

doing.

Classrooms, bathrooms, cafeteria...all were empty and silent. Tommy knew that the faculty rooms had been locked up prior to the start of the dance so he didn't bother checking them during his rounds. There was silence from the walkie-talkie, which was both a comfort and unsettling for him. The five in the gym weren't bad kids but he still knew that when the cat was away the mice would play, party and on occasion break things just for the hell of it. He figured that they would be too concerned with helping Mickey to make too much trouble.

He paused as he passed by the ramp that led to the art room. For a moment he listened, unsure of whether or not his ears had deceived him. Then he heard it again, a faint shuffling sound from within the room, as if someone had moved between a desk. Grimacing Tommy hastened down the ramp, wondering just who in the hell had decided to go rummaging in his artistic sanctuary. He threw the door open, prepared to rain holy hell down on the miscreants but the only thing that he saw were empty easels in a dark and otherwise deserted classroom. Frowning Tommy walked into the room, looking around in the darkness. He hadn't mistaken the sounds, that much he was sure of. His senses on edge he glanced at the low windows but they were all securely fastened. For good measure he squinted, flush with the panes and looked out at the dark empty field but not so much as a cat was in sight.

Maybe he had imagined it after all, or perhaps he'd picked up a faulty transmission from the other walkie-talkies. Sighing, he shook his head and turned back towards the dark room, sinking wearily into his desk. He hoped that they could get the clean up done as quickly as possible. Then he could be free to go back to his apartment and maybe give a late night call to Jamie in California.

The computer on his desk was asleep and he shook the mouse. With a slight shock he saw that he had forgotten to exit out of the webpage he'd been visiting before he'd gone to chaperone the dance earlier that evening.

It was an uncontrollable tradition of his every Halloween to read whatever he could about Michael Myers. Since he'd been old enough to read things on his own Tommy had poked into every bit of material on the man that he could find. It had been a factor in his writing the comics and even all these years he was still finding new pieces of information from Michael's life, killings that some people had attributed to him and alleged sightings, some as far away as Canada. Most of it was all conspiracy theories from quacks on message boards but some of it had been quite interesting.

Tommy had been delving into Michael's time at Smith's Grove after school had ended and now as he looked at the image attached to the article he'd been reading he felt a strange chill and a desire to rush back to the gym overtook him. It was a picture that had been taken on the day of Michael's escape from the hospital. A destroyed room, grim faced investigators...and a wall that had the word SISTER carved into it.

Tommy glanced to the side of the room where he'd stored his third period art class's projects from earlier. He remembered Mickey's piece, his depiction of his fear, or of what evil was to him, Tommy

had yet to determine which the boy had chosen but the resemblance between the carving on the wall of Michael's old room and the etching Mickey had made in the canvas was chilling.

Tommy turned and made to stand up when he noticed something that made him pause. The bottom of his desk drawer was slightly open. He kept it securely shut whenever he left the classroom. Bending down he pulled the drawer open.

The white, empty eyed mask was still there.

But it wasn't the mask that the production company had given him after the movie deal had gone belly up. It was clean white and cheap, made by some costume company as a sick Halloween outfit. Kids across the country who had no respect for what had gone on thirty-five years ago dressed up in a masks similar to this.

Tommy reached down and picked it up, examining it as though hoping it would tell him something.

The door to his back office creaked open.

Tommy turned around and felt his blood run cold. Michael stood in the door to his office, the beat up old prop mask covering his face. Tommy knew in one single hopeless, horrifying moment that this was no practical joker. This was the real man, the sheer intimidating presence of him, that undeniable evil radiating from his body. Tommy was a child again, afraid and wanting Laurie to keep him safe only Laurie was gone and there was nobody to help him.

He stumbled away with a desperate cry but Michael was on him in one long easy stride, seizing the back of Tommy's ponytail and yanking him closer. Tommy screamed for help, his vision blurring with images of the innocent students in the gym, of his wife and daughter and of Lindsey Wallace.

Tommy let out a pitiful noise halfway between a sob and a scream that drowned out in a gurgle as Michael plunged the end of the pencil sharpening knife into his throat. Blood oozed over his massive hands and he let go of Tommy's hair. Tommy sank to the floor, clutching at his throat, his body sliding against the sides of his desk, his eyes wide as they stared up at the impassive empty white face over top of him.

He let out a choked wheeze...and then his body became still as the comfortable darkness took him at last.

18. Chapter 18

The boy had tried to trick him.

Michael had kept to the alleys outside of his house, biding his time as long as he possibly could, keeping an eye on the steady glow from the kitchen windows of the house where the boy lived. He wanted to steal upon him at the most opportune moment and judging from how he'd reacted when Michael had stood in his front yard earlier the boy wasn't afraid of becoming confrontational, even with somebody of Michael's size.

It had intrigued him to see how courageous and angry the boy had been. There had been a moment's shock on his part, which Michael had anticipated but his fearless provocation and threats had been incredibly interesting to Michael. He was used to the fear and the annoyance but even people who caught glimpses of him unmasked were keen to avoid his height and breadth and most of all the intimidating darkness that he exuded.

Yet the boy hadn't even show an ounce of fear and once more Michael felt that kindred spark inside of him, as though he had met a long lost family member. Even as he stalked through the dark and dusty alleyway he still did not know what he was going to do with the boy. Killing him would snuff that curiosity out but somehow the part of Michael that thirsted for bloodshed was not interested in murdering the boy. It was frustrating to feel this strange fixation and for a long while he contemplated simply leaving Haddonfield and finding someone else less vexing to draw blood from.

But the boy's pull over Michael was too strong. It was long after night had settled and the distant street had grown quiet that Michael crept into the backyard of the house, keeping well out of the light cast by the lone bulb in the kitchen. Age had taken some of his resilience but he still had the benefit of moving almost noiselessly in the darkness. Without so much as a creak of the patio boards he stood in front of the sliding glass door, looking over the dining room table and into the distant living room. He could just see the glare of the television, impeded by the top of a large sofa.

For a moment he simply stood there, waiting to see if the lower level was truly deserted. The breeze picked up, sighing through the almost bare branches of the trees in the neighbouring yards. In the distance a dog barked and Michael realized with a flicker of annoyance that he had not eaten a thing since leaving Canada. Eating for him was done out of necessity but now as he stood looking into the empty kitchen of the boy's house he felt it gnawing at him as it never had before. He was hungry. For a split second Michael considered abandoning his vigil and stalking to the source of the dog's barking for a quick bite to eat but with a resilience born of his darkness he ignored the notion. There were more important things than food.

He silently slid the screen door open and crept into the kitchen, grimacing as the light stung his eyes. Without a thought for the consequences he flicked the light switch off...and instantly retreated to the nearby pantry, ducking his head to avoid hitting it against a high shelf.

He hadn't anticipated there being anybody in the living room. For all intents and purposes the house, at least the ground floor of it, had seemed deserted but the second he'd killed the lights in the kitchen somebody in the living room had moved off the sofa as quick as a shot, striding to the kitchen with the sound of a clicking gun.

And as he stood in the cramped, dark space watching through the narrow slats of the door he saw to his surprise that the alarmed person was not the boy, but the sheriff, her dark hair tumbling down to her shoulders, a shiny black gun trained on the corner of the kitchen.

Michael hated guns, the way they stung at his body when they fired into him, the acrid metal smell they left in the air. He shrunk

farther back into the pantry as the sheriff turned her attentions to the slatted door, the gun aimed straight ahead. Her eyes narrowed she crept towards the door, her free hand outstretched. Michael felt a sinking resignation as he realized that he was unarmed and although he could overpower the woman he did not trust his treacherous body to be able to do much damage before she fired a bullet between his eyes.

She closed her hand around the door knob...

Suddenly from the upper levels came the loud, unmistakeable sound of a child crying. The sheriff whirled around without a moment's thought and dashed out of the kitchen, all thoughts of her search forgotten.

The second he heard her footfalls on the stairs Michael slid out of the pantry, following in the sheriff's footsteps through the dark living room and pausing just by the foot of the stairs, listening as the woman attempted to quiet the child. Even at this distance Michael could hear what was being said.

"Where's Mousey? I want Mousey!" The child sniffled.

"Shhh Dexter," the sheriff said gently. "It's alright. Your brother just went to the school for a little bit. He'll be back okay?"

The high school...

Michael didn't wait any longer to hear what else the woman would say. He turned and opened the front door. Before stepping out into the cool, dark night he noticed something on a small table near the door, something that glinted in the weak light from up the stairs.

It was a kitchen knife, long and lethal.

Not one for looking a gift horse in the mouth Michael swiftly and silently took the knife from the table and stepped outside. He left the door open, the child in him giggling in delight at what a terrible shock it would be for the sheriff to see it wide open. She would not leave the child, of that he was sure but still he felt it necessary to depart from the vicinity of the house as quickly as possible.

He found the high school almost completed deserted. For half a moment Michael allowed himself to believe that the sheriff had been lying to the child and that the boy he sought had gone somewhere else. He would make her pay for that lie, for leading him to this empty school and for misleading the little boy who had been so frightened upon waking without his older brother there. Gun or no gun the sheriff would taste his knife for manipulating the belief of a child and for leading he himself astray.

That violent urge however had been diverted to the man with the ponytail.

Michael caught sight of him leaving through a large set of doors and had felt as he had with the sheriff a sense of recognition from the depths of his memory. He would have stood pondering on the identity of the man but mere moments later two other people came out of the doors, a dark skinned young man and a redheaded girl with glasses,

both in costumes.

"Keep an eye on Mickey while we're gone!" The girl called over her shoulder.

Mickey...yes, that was the boy's name. So he had come to the school after all...

For a moment long after the two young people had disappeared down the hallway, giggling and stumbling over each other as they went, Michael stood in the shadowy alcove, wondering what to do next.

He had no doubt that the boy was just beyond in the room through the double doors, so close to being in his grasp and yet he still didn't know quite what to do with him. The only thing he was certain of, and it made him mightily confused, was that neither the darkness nor the child wanted the boy dead yet.

Both forces wanted to play.

So he'd found his way down to the untidy, dark room at the bottom of the ramp, rummaging through paint brushes and pencil sharpeners in hopes of finding something to aid in setting up his haunted house. He'd found the mask in the desk quite by accident and stared at it momentarily, feeling a strange sense of affinity for it. The one he'd stolen from the parking lot earlier was too white, too clean and too flimsy. This mask looked as though it had been with him through all his ordeals wearing it, aged yet still with the unmistakable power to strike fear into the hearts and minds of all those who saw it.

He hadn't meant to draw attention to himself and when he heard the footsteps approaching down the ramp he'd hurriedly hidden himself in the small room at the back of the classroom, leaving the door the smallest fraction open as he watched the man investigate his room and finally settle on using his computer.

Michael had watched, the child giddy with anticipation as the evil reared up inside of him, sadistically gleeful at such an opportune moment to commit murder. He found the small sharpening knife on the desk in the back room and struck the second the man had been in preparation to leave.

Much like the sheriff earlier it was the fear and disbelief in his victim's eyes as Michael watched him die that served as a way of jogging his memory, a memory of the little boy who had dropped his pumpkin, who had witnessed him watching Laurie from the house across the street, who had tried to warn her of the approaching evil.

It was with a grim sense of satisfaction that Michael left the man's body slumped on the floor. Laurie had only prolonged that child's life much as she'd prolonged her own. He was too great a force to keep at bay for anybody.

As he walked through the dim hallways he heard a familiar sound echo from the end of the corridor. A long, drawn out moan that reverberated in the silence.

With deathly silence he walked to where the source of the noise had emanated from and to his immense surprise found himself standing in a large, dark room that smelled of rubber and grease.

There were four or five cars parked in a row, some missing tires, others with their hoods open. Along the sides of the room were work shelves and piles of dark blankets, all covered in a fine layer of grease. Keeping to these comfortably dark edges Michael watched, taking note of the dark shapes moving in a dark vehicle near one end of the room. The windows of the vehicle were fogged over but still he could see the unmistakable figures of the boy and girl he'd seen leaving through the double doors earlier plainly engaged in the throes of passion.

He narrowed his eyes. Sex, when he had inevitably learned what it was at Smith's Grove, was something he had never shared in and never wanted too. To him it was far too primal and emotional, a simple exchange of flesh and fluids that people engaged in for reasons he did not wish to think on. After all, it had been what his hated sister had abandoned him for when he was small.

However it served as a necessary distraction.

He didn't want to get them yet. Not when they were both together although it would have made quite a delightful kill. It was far more thrilling to get people when they were alone.

He did not have to wait long. The car rocked and the noises from within increased to a fever pitch. Michael's hand closed tightly around the knife in the pocket of his overalls, his fingers curling tightly over the handle, his pulse quickening in anticipation.

The boy let out a guttural groan and then there was silence in the car for a moment. The vehicle rocked slightly and a second later the boy emerged from the vehicle, shrugging on the long white coat of his costume. Before shutting the door he turned back to the girl and pulled the coat open, exposing himself to her.

"See anything you like?" He said teasingly.

The girl giggled but said, "Can't see anything without my glasses baby."

The boy laughed, closed his coat and said, "I'll be in the boy's showers if you need me." Then he turned and picked his way out of the dark garage, cursing as he knocked over something metallic that crashed to the hard ground.

Michael waited in the shadows, keeping his eyes on the car. The girl shifted and a moment later music filled the room. She had turned on the radio and from what Michael could see she was bobbing her head in time to the music.

Silently he crept towards the car, his hands curled over the knife, his eyes on the back of the girl's head. She was looking down, still moving her head to the music. As he drew closer Michael heard the soft scrape of a nail file. All the better for him. The more distracted she was the easier it would be.

He opened the door behind the side of the car where she sat. She didn't even look up, the sounds of the music masking the noise of the day. She could not however ignore when the car dipped at the weight of Michael's body as he sat down behind her seat.

She had been wearing glasses when Michael had seen her with the boy earlier. She squinted into the rearview mirror and for half a moment Michael expected her to scream or scramble out of the car but to his surprise she smirked and shook her head.

"That was fast. Where'd you get the football helmet?" She said, looking back down at her nails. The child in Michael laughed in demented glee. She really couldn't see very well without her glasses on.

All the better for him.

He pulled the knife out of his overalls and plunged it through the back of the front seat, satisfaction coursing through his veins as he felt it stab through the girl's body. She screamed as Michael pulled the blade out and made a wild move to the door but the next second he had seized her forehead with his free hand and pinned her against the seat, forcing the knife through the seat of the car and into her again and again, relishing the feel of it pushing through flesh.

She ceased struggling after only a few moments.

The radio continued playing its smooth love song. The girl's body slumped sideways in the front of the car. Michael stared at it for a brief moment.

Then he opened the door and stepped back into the dark garage, walking away from the car and the girl's body, wiping the blade of the knife on the side of his overalls. Before leaving the room he noticed a dark, thin coil of engine belting on one of the shelves. Michael picked it up, running the sinewy line through his fingers.

Then left the garage, walking through the dark hallway, the fan belt gripped tightly in his hand, towards the locker room where the girl's boyfriend had said he would be.

But first he wanted to check in on Mickey.

Just for a moment.

For a moment Mickey didn't know what it was that had disturbed his comfortable sleep. All he knew was that his head was killing him and his vision was blurry, his eyes still half closed.

Somebody was saying his name through a grainy radio transmission. He reached a hand out in a disoriented sweep, muttering darkly when it met the walkie-talkie which fell over with a loud clatter that made him squeeze his eyes shut in pain and aggravation.

Blindly he groped around for the walkie-talkie, found it and brought it to his lips, gripping it tightly to make sure he didn't drop it.

"What?" He said grumpily. He could already feel his wakefulness leaving and hoped for the sake of the person sending the transmission that whatever they had to say was brief.

"It's me," said a voice that he dimly registered belonging to

Pierce.

"Whaddya want?" Mickey mumbled, still keeping his eyes shut tightly. To his knowledge he was still on the gym floor although his head was spinning so fast for all he knew he could be suspended from the singing.

The transmission opened again.

Mickey grimaced at the choking sound Pierce was making, a guttural gurgling noise that he was all too familiar with.

"Cute," he said miserably. "Real cute. Hey I hope you don't get anything in Laney's hair. She'll look like a fucking strawberry sundae."

Pierce let out a choked gasp in response. If Mickey had had the energy to open his eyes he would have rolled them. Really it was bad enough that he was surrounded by two happy couples without them having to go broadcasting it whenever they screwed around.

Not that they ever had before.

"I'm not giving you the benefit of knowing how pissed off this is making me," he said, cutting off Pierce's transmission. There was a long silence. Mickey frowned, having assumed that his friend would have kept the baiting up just to be a prick but there was nothing. Finally, in disgust he clicked the feed on one last time and said, "I really hope that was enjoyable for you. Both of you. And PS, you're a real asshole y'know that?"

He threw the walkie talkie across the gym, smiling when he heard it break open several feet away but wincing at the loud clatter of it.

Then he rolled over, put an arm over his eyes and was soon fast asleep once more and oblivious to everything around him.

19. Chapter 19

Curtis wasn't the kind of person known for taking anything lying down. It was what made him such a valuable asset to the team. Yet even after he left Mickey sleeping in the gym he felt the all too familiar feeling of hopeless creep up on him as it did every time he thought about his best friend. Immediately, just like every other time that feeling stole over him, he felt anger flare up in his chest. Why the hell couldn't Mickey just let him rearrange his father's face? The rat bastard had it coming by this point and as far as Curtis was concerned it would make everybody involved feel a hell of a lot better. Mr. Morris wasn't in any position of influence besides in his own home and at this point Curtis didn't care what the consequences were. He just wanted the man to leave Mickey alone.

It didn't help that the kid had to be so damn understanding all the time. And what had happened at the dance had been more than enough proof that Mickey really wanted to get away, even if it meant drinking his weight in alcohol. It wasn't fair. Mickey was kind and loyal and always trying to make everybody laugh. He deserved better than the hand he'd been dealt.

Scowling Curtis marched through the field to the bleachers where he could just see Vanessa sitting, running her hand through her long blonde hair. It didn't take a rocket scientist to see that she was just as upset by the night's events as he was.

She looked up as he approached and gave him a small smile.

"How's he doing?" She asked softly, shivering a little as the breeze picked up.

"Went back to sleep," Curtis said as he sank down beside her. Automatically he draped an arm around her shoulder and she cuddled up to him, resting her head against his shoulder. He loved the warmth and the closeness and he thought of how warm Mickey had been earlier that evening and when he'd hugged him at his house. It had been impulsive and even though they'd hugged it out before Curtis knew that the embrace at the door had meant something a little deeper.

Mickey liked hugs. He liked being shown that he mattered and ever since the day Curtis had found out about the way Mickey's parents treated him he'd made it his mission to show Mickey that he was important to him.

"I hate this," Curtis said softly a few moments of silence.

"I know baby," Vanessa replied. "And he knows that too."

"I just don't get why he won't let me do anything."

Vanessa sighed heavily, stroking his exposed shoulder with her small, soft hand. "He's scared honey," she said after a moment. "People like Mickey...they end up living with the bad stuff so long that all they ever expect is that things will get worse."

"You're serious about this huh?" Curtis said with a teasing grin.

"Mhm. How'd you guess?"

"You haven't said 'totally' since I started talking to you."

Vanessa laughed and gave him a quick kiss on the side of his face. "You'll figure something out big guy," she said. "Whether it involves face mangling or not."

Curtis chuckled and held her closer. For a very long time they stayed that way, huddled close together, looking out over the dark football field, warmed by each other in spite of the chilly night air. She was one of the many things Curtis was thankful for, not just for her beauty and intelligence but also for her compassion and how understanding she was. He still didn't quite understand just what it was that he felt for Mickey but Vanessa never once seemed put off by it. She wasn't thirsting for something to develop the way Laney seemed to be but Curtis knew that whatever happened Vanessa wasn't going to be someone that just waltzed out of his life. She'd weather an F5 tornado with him if it came down to it and that only made him love her all the more.

Sometimes he wondered if it were possible to be in love with two people.

Vanessa shivered once more. The breeze was getting stronger and she huddled closer to him. Curtis, with his legs and arms exposed by his costume felt the chill of the night as well.

"Shoulda asked Mickey for my letters," he murmured.

Vanessa shook her head. "He totally would have clawed my eyes out if I asked. Besides that jacket is his and always will be." She glanced over her shoulder at the school and frowned. "It totally can't have taken Mr. Doyle that long to go checking the halls."

Curtis frowned as well and suddenly regretted having left the walkie-talkie in the gym with Mickey.

"And Pierce totally doesn't have enough stamina to go for over half an hour," Vanessa added.

Curtis narrowed his eyes and looked down at her. "And how exactly would you know that?"

Vanessa wrinkled her nose at him and said cheekily, "Girl talk." Then they both got to their feet and headed back to the school, Vanessa's hand securely in his. Together they walked the perimeter back to the front doors, which had been unlocked for the dance.

As they made their way through the hallways back towards the gym Curtis tried to steer his thoughts in a more positive direction. After they rounded everybody up, dropped Mickey off and finished doing the tear down he'd take them back to his place to crash. His mother wouldn't mind. She liked his friends. He'd figure out what to do about Mickey's dick of a father over the weekend.

As they were walking past the hallway that turned off to the car mechanic and wood shop classes Vanessa suddenly slipped and tumbled to the ground, landing flat on her ass.

"Careful babe," he said, stooping to help her up.

Vanessa didn't move. She sat there, frozen for a moment, a look of confusion on her face. She wiped a finger on the floor and let out a yelp of horror, scrambling to her feet and backing away.

Curtis felt his stomach churn.

Vanessa had slipped on something dark and red, something that stained her uniform and fingers. He scanned the floor that led down to the dim hallway beyond. The trail continued in a thin trail across the linoleum, visible almost along the whole hallway.

"Oh God," Vanessa moaned, "oh God oh God..." Curtis looked and saw that Vanessa was staring in horror at a door to a classroom just behind him. The trail went under the door, where it ended.

Curtis' first impulse was to fling the door open and confront whatever it was that lay beyond but he reeled that in in a microsecond. He needed to get Vanessa away from here and then look for the others.

"Come on babe," he said quietly, closing a hand over her wrist. She was shaking so violently that he was surprised her hair wasn't falling off. "We need to--"

His words were drowned out by her ear splitting scream. The door had opened and for one second Curtis got a look at the tall, broad figure within, a man who seemed to fill up the darkness as much as he was a part of it. The gaping black eyes on his bone white, scuffed up mask stared at them without any hint of emotion for the briefest of seconds before Curtis, still with his hand grasping his screaming girlfriend by the wrist, turned them both around and bolted down the hallway, not daring to turn back.

The gym, he thought desperately, _we've got to get Mickey_! But they were headed away from it, back to the front doors.

They turned the corner the led back to the foyer and a glance over his shoulder told Curtis that Michael Myers was still in pursuit, a long knife gripped tightly in his hand.

"This way," he said, practically shoving Vanessa before him as they took off across the foyer as fast as their legs could carry them, turning down another hallway. Vanessa slammed into one of the classroom doors and yanked in vain at the knob. Curtis tugged her away, shaking his head.

"Mr. Doyle locked them!" He reminded her.

"Look out!" She cried, seizing him by the front of his costume and pulling him out of the way just in time for the knife to connect with the wall where his head had been a second before.

They scampered away from the scene, running down the long hallway, passed the windows of the dark and deserted main office, Michael bearing down on them.

As they passed by the exit to the stairs that led to the upper level of the school Curtis thought wildly of going up that way but knew better. They stood less of a chance of escaping if they went that way. If only they could turn around and run back towards the gym, where he prayed to God Mickey would still be sleeping safe and sound with Pierce and Laney watching over him then they could all bolt out the double doors to the field and find help.

If they could only get somewhere they could hide! How many of the doors had Mr. Doyle locked in his rounds? And where the hell had he gone?

Don't think about it, he told himself stubbornly as he and Vanessa fled around a corner that led to the cafeteria. They glanced at each other only once before charging at the doors which to his relief had not been locked.

The cafeteria was dark, all the chairs piled on top of the sea of circular tables where the students sat. There was nowhere to hide in here but Vanessa, tugging desperately at his wrist, had seemingly found the perfect place. Together they hurtled through the empty cafeteria, ducking behind the serving counter and stumbling towards a big steel door. Vanessa reached out her hand and wrenched it open and

together they tumbled into the kitchen, slamming the door shut behind them and locking it. They slid against the back of the door, sinking onto the cold linoleum.

Curtis glanced at Vanessa and saw that she was still shaking, her face tear stained. Without a word he wrapped his arms around her and held her on the floor as sobbed silently into his chest.

With the threat of Michael Myers barred by the door Curtis himself began to feel the full weight of what had just happened. The chase, the mask...and the blood. Blood that had to have come from somebody...and there were only four other people in the building as far as he knew.

Mickey, he thought, _please be okay_.

"We've...we've gotta to back," Vanessa said after pulling herself together. She wiped at her eyes and looked around the dark, cramped kitchen. "L-laney and Pierce...and...and Mickey." She swallowed heavily and began to shake again.

"Right," Curtis said as he stroked the back of her hair. "You stay here and I'll-

"Bullshit I will!" Vanessa said hotly, getting to her feet in spite of her shaky legs. "You really fucking think I'm going to let you go out there alone?"

"Nessa-"

"No!" She said, her eyes flashing angrily. "I love them too Curt and I don't give a shit if he...if that..." She took a deep, calming breath and said in a much more level voice, "Michael Myers is out there and so are at least...some of our friends." Vanessa shook at the thought. "I'm not going to lose you too Curtis."

She peered over the small porthole window in the door that looked out into the serving area, not noticing the way Curtis looked at her, the mingled admiration and love on his face at her stubborn courage.

"There's no one out there," she said quietly.

They could break into the office, Curtis thought as he peered out the window with her. Then he could make her stay there and call for help while he went to find their friends and hopefully Mr. Doyle.

Vanessa turned and let out a low moan.

Curtis turned and instantly saw what it was that she was looking at. Across the kitchen was another door that led to the hallway. It was for the students who had the culinary class to use to enter the kitchen.

"I'll lock it," he said and made his way around the counter tops and ovens. To his mingled annoyance and amusement he heard Vanessa following him and knew that no matter what she wasn't going to just sit back and let him be the hero.

The door was located next to the large, walk in refrigerator. Like

the door from the serving area there was a circular window that overlooked the dark hallway beyond. Curtis put his hand on the knob to lock it.

Michael's masked face appeared in the window and before Curtis could turn the lock the door was thrown violently open. He staggered backwards as Vanessa screamed and his first thought was for her. He pushed her back, never turning away from the monster of a man bearing down on them, even as the knife slashed through the air, cutting through the front of his costume, slicing at his skin.

With reflexes born of years of athleticism Curtis reached out for the handle of the fridge and yanked on it, swinging it open in front of them just as Michael's knife plunged for his chest. The impact of the misaimed stab sent the killer stumbling backwards into a counter.

Knowing he had precious moments to spare Curtis whirled around, seized Vanessa by the arms and gave her a fierce but brief kiss on the lips.

"Try and stay warm baby," he said. "I love you."

"No!" She screamed, trying to wriggle out of his grasp but he was too strong. He flung her into the large, chilled room and slammed the heavy metal door shut.

The next second Michael shoved the knife into his gut.

It was pain unlike anything he had ever felt before and he let out a groaning cry. Behind him he could hear Vanessa pounding against the door, screaming and sobbing for him.

Michael pulled the knife out and Curtis stumbled backwards, dazed with pain, blood seeping from him. He splayed his hand wildly over the counter and found a heavy skillet. Michael raised the knife again and Curtis swung the skillet as hard as he could. It connected with the side of the killer's head and he jerked sideways, sinking against the counter. Curtis let the frying pan drop, feeling dizzy and light headed.

Michael righted himself the next second and redoubled his grip on his weapon. Curtis staggered backwards, clutching at his wound and tripped over the skillet, landing painfully on his back.

For a moment Michael simply stood over him, looking down with his empty eyes, the knife hovering in front of his victim's face, Curtis' blood dripping off the blade.

"Go fuck yourself," he spat at the killer just as Michael brought the knife down, plunging into Curtis' chest in two brutal strokes, blood flying into the air as the blade parted with his body. Curtis let out a sob of despondent pain as he lay there, his body opened by the maniac. He wanted to see his friends, just one more time, to apologize to Mickey for not being able to keep him safe.

For a moment the killer simply stared down at him impassively. Then Michael turned and walked away from the bleeding boy, not even bothering to open the refrigerator, ignoring the hysteric, pleading screams of the girl trapped inside.

20. Chapter 20

Mickey's eyes were open before he was fully aware of being awake. He was lying on the hard, cold floor of the gym, staring across the dark distance at the glowing red exit sign for several seconds, waiting to sink back into his stupored sleep. The first thing he became aware of was that his mask had fallen off the top of his head in his sleep, the silver half face glinting inches from his own. After a full minute of his senses catching up with his body he gave it up for dead. His neck was sore from being on the uncomfortable ground and as he struggled to a sitting position he was aware of the dull throb in his head. Just sitting up straight seemed like a chore and somehow he knew that he wouldn't be getting back to sleep any time soon.

As he sat there coping with what he was sure would inevitably be a killer hangover he attempted to get his bearings. The gym was dark, he was alone, he was pretty sure that it was way after nine-thirty by this point...with a shiver he felt the unmistakable sense that all three of those things pointed to an even bigger problem.

Something was wrong.

Something was very wrong. Even as far as practical jokes went his friends would never just abandon him in the dark this way. And he was pretty sure that the gym lights hadn't been shut off the last time he'd been awake. The only light now came from the red glow of the emergency exits and the distant stage which was lit up by the electronic jack-o-lanterns, their evil faces grinning at him across the empty expanse of hardwood floor.

Mickey frowned as he peered closer at them.

That wasn't right either. None of the decorations had been pulled down on the stage or even from the walls. As he got shakily to his feet, his eyes still fixed forward he saw that some of the mannequins had even been knocked over. The hairs on the back of his neck prickled as he walked towards the stage and he felt the immense weight of his being alone all the more. He wanted his friends there, to jump out at him and cackle wildly at having pulled such a great last minute Halloween joke on him. But he knew without really knowing how that this was not a prank. There was something terribly wrong and he didn't want to think on what it was.

His foot kicked something on the dark floor in front of him, something that clattered over the wood.

He looked down and saw with a rush of relief that he'd almost stepped on the walkie-talkie. He remembered in an almost dream-like way that he'd thrown it from him earlier. He thought he'd broken it but luckily the impact had only served to pop the battery pack out of the back of the device. Hastily Mickey scrambled to put it back together and clicked it back on.

"Guys?" He said into the speaker.

There was silence for a moment, broken by a shrill, distant beep which was followed by a muffled noise from somewhere far off to his left.

Mickey frowned and walked towards the double doors, away from the stage. He clicked into the feed again and said, "What the hell is going on?"

Again he heard the beep, this time closer at hand as though it were coming from the other side of the doors. Just like before it was followed by a muffled response. It sounded like somebody was talking out in the hallway. Maybe they were trying to respond to his transmission? Mickey shook the walkie-talkie, wondering if maybe he'd screwed up the frequency when he'd thrown it across the gym floor.

Carefully he pushed the gym door open.

The hallway beyond was dark. Not a single overhead light burned and for one wild moment Mickey was seized by a paralyzing fear. He just wanted to have somebody here with him, somebody that he could share this terrible sense of dread with. Swallowing that sensation down he brought the walkie talkie to his lips once more.

"This is Mickey," he said into it.

Another beep.

And then, from down the hall he heard the staticky response. "This is Mickey."

He lost no time in going after the noise even though he knew what it was that he would find. Sure enough, in the middle of the hallway lay another walkie-talkie, the red light on the side blinking slowly as it ran out of power. Frustration spiked in his veins, momentarily overpowering his fear. His friends wouldn't go to these lengths to pull a prank on him, least of all Curtis who would pummel anything that made Mickey feel unsafe into a bloody pulp if he got the opportunity.

Cold with unease Mickey turned the dial on the second walkie-talkie, shutting off and left it in the hallway. He remembered Mr. Doyle having said that there were three walkie's, one for himself, one for Pierce and Laney and one for Vanessa and Curtis.

Curtis had left his walkie-talkie in the gym, so Mickey knew that there had to be one more. Maybe Pierce and Laney were stuffed together in one of the janitor closets and had turned theirs off to afford some privacy. Mickey remembered, once more in that fuzzy way that made it hard for him to determine if it had been a dream or reality, that Pierce had reached him on his walkie earlier. Could he and Laney have decided to have another go at it?

But why turn the lights off? He thought with a sinking feeling of terrible rationality as he walked slowly and aimlessly down the dark and empty hallway. He glanced at a clock over the water fountain and saw with an even greater sense of anxiety that it was after ten. It had been nine-thirty when he'd fallen asleep after Curtis had left him in the gym.

His hands shaking he clicked the walkie-talkie again. "Come on guys please I'm starting to freak out here," he said, trying hard to keep his voice under control. There was nothing but the silence.

Mickey gulped and opened the frequency once more but this time he chose not to say a word. He listened as hard as he could, straining his ears for it. Once more he pressed down on the button. He heard it then, faint and distant but unmistakeable in this tomb-like silence.

A beep, further on down the hallway and around the corner. Walking as fast as he could Mickey brought the walkie to his mouth again and said, "HEY!" as loudly as he could, not liking the way his voice cut through this still, ominous silence.

He heard his own voice once more in response, nearer than before. This time he didn't even have to speak again to discover the location of the last walkie talkie. He continued pressing down on the side button, following the shrill beep along the locker lined hallway, his heart hammering as he drew closer to the source of the responding noise.

It was coming from behind a classroom door at the opposite end of the hallway, close to where the shop classes were located, a door that had a faint yellow glow emanating from underneath it as though somebody had lit a bonfire inside. Mickey's shoe squeaked as he slowly approached the door and he grimaced. Had they really gone through all this trouble just to surprise him with some kind of Halloween treat? If the door was unlocked then Mr. Doyle would have had to have been in on it too. His friends he could understand but the mellow art teacher allowing them to goof off? That was going too far.

Grimly Mickey turned the knob and pushed the door open, stepping into the dimly lit room.

The door swung silently closed behind him.

For half a moment he didn't understand what he was seeing. The projector had been turned on at the back of the room, casting it's light over the desks and whiteboard. There was something, or rather someone sprawled out over the long teacher's desk, someone small in a white costume. As he approached the desk Mickey felt his heart fly into his throat as he saw who it was, her flaming red hair fanned out behind her. He stood stock still, a small moan escaping his lips as he gazed at Laney. She wasn't breathing and her skin was pale. Even from the few yards off that he was standing he could see that her eyes were wide, gaping in an eternal stare at the ceiling.

His legs weak Mickey backed away and bumped into the back of the door...and something heavy and cold. Unable to control himself he turned around and let out a horrified yelp, scrambling away from the door. He tripped over his own feet and landed square on his ass, scrambling into the legs of a desk, staring in petrified disbelief at the thing that had been suspended to the back of the door from the teacher's coat hook.

A thing that had only a few hours ago been Pierce. Now it was just a body, his head bowed, the long white coat of his costume open, revealing dark skin. Even in the weak light of the projector Mickey could see the deep, purple welt around his neck and the walkie talkie which had been affixed to the pocket of his lab coat.

"N-no," he moaned, feeling his eyes begin to sting with tears. This was a nightmare, brought on by too much alcohol. Any second now he would wake up in the gym with Curtis and Vanessa next to him, tearing down the decorations on the wall while Laney and Pierce dismantled the stage props.

Mickey shrank against the desk and felt something brush the back of his head, something soft and dangling. He looked up and cried out in horror and disgust, scampering away from the desk and getting shakily back on his feet, backing slowly away from the body of Mr. Doyle, slumped against the desk, his head turned to the side, a gaping hole in his throat. Two long paintbrushes had been violently jammed into his eye sockets, protruding outwards like grisly stalks of wheat.

The projector light turned off and for a moment Mickey was blinded by the sudden darkness, spots dancing in front of his vision as his watering eyes adjusted to the loss of light.

Something emerged from the blackness behind the projector, something with a death white face that walked slowly towards him, it's empty eyes on Mickey, who backed against the teacher's desk where Laney's corpse lay. Michael walked calmly towards him, a large knife held idly at his side. Mickey shook violently, his eyes never leaving those soulless sockets in front of him, his heart jack-hammering against his ribs. Every ounce of his body was screaming for him to run but he couldn't move, he could only stare as the shape drew level with him.

For a long, lingering moment Michael stood there, his eyeless gaze holding Mickey to the spot. Mickey felt it would be the smart thing to do to run but he didn't want to. He would only find worse things if he left this room of death. He just wanted it to be over, to get away from all the hurt and the loss.

His hand touched Laney's lifeless one.

He thought about Dexter, and of Vanessa and Curtis.

Vanessa and Curtis...they could still be out there.

Like a flash flood the fight returned to him and with a savage cry he wrapped his hand around a pen next to Laney's hand and charged at Michael, jabbing it into the bastard's right eye. Michael staggered away from him, his hand grasping at the end of the pen protruding from his socket.

Mickey didn't bother waiting to see what happened next. He bolted away from the shocked killer, ignoring Pierce's body as he pushed the door open and fled into the dark hallway, not even bothering to look back as blind panic pushed him away from the room, down the corridor and further on.

He didn't look back to see if Michael was giving chase. He didn't need to use his eyes to know that the killer would follow no matter what. He threw himself against doors, yanking in vain in the knobs and pounding on them, hoping to God that at least Curtis or Vanessa would have taken shelter in one of the rooms but nobody was going to help him. Still, he wasn't going to leave until he found the rest of his friends. They had to be alive. Mickey wouldn't accept the

possibility that Michael had gotten to them, not until he saw it for himself.

He thundered up the stairs to the upper level, running as fast as he could down the science hallway, not knowing where he was going. As he ran passed the banister that overlooked the main floor foyer he stopped and ducked out of sight. Michael had come down the hallway from the classroom where he'd displayed the bodies. Mickey stayed down, pressed against the smooth surface of the low wall. He listened, his heart racing, as the killer's heavy footsteps fell against the linoleum of the floor below. He couldn't stay hidden up here forever. Sooner or later Michael would find him. He had to get away, find somewhere to hide, somewhere he could think straight. The science wing continued to his right, while going left would take him down to the technology and english classrooms.

But there was one more place he could go, somewhere dark and cluttered where he could hide. As Michael's footsteps echoed below him Mickey careful began to move, half stooped over so as not to give himself away. He crept along, making for the english wing but instead of continuing all the way down it he turned right and found to his relief that the door marked STAGE ACCESS hadn't been locked.

Mickey looked behind him at the door that led to the stairs and felt his heart skip a beat as he saw Michael come into view from the lower level. Without hesitation Mickey slid the door open and closed it behind him, turning the lock and hissing when it made a loud click. He jumped when he felt Michael's weight on the door. The knob jiggled violently but the lock wouldn't be giving way any time soon. For one heart stopping moment Mickey expected the killer to try breaking the door down but a second later the shaking ceased. Michael had moved on. Breathing a sigh of relief Mickey looked around. He was in near total darkness now with the exception of the red glow from the exit sign above the door.

He was in the technical stage, used for storing props and working the lights and sound for plays and dances. Silently he walked along the dark, narrow hallway, shivering in terror as all that had happened in the last several minutes caught up with him. He would not give up his search for Curtis and Vanessa, not even if he had to dodge Michael all over the school.

Picking his way through old props and wiring Mickey followed the vast corridor, keeping his senses alert for any sort of movement. There was a faint amber glow some away ahead of him. Coming to the banisters that cut off the technical stage from the main stage he glanced down and saw that the electronic jack-o-lanterns below were still lit, the Halloween dummies still toppled over as if someone had pushed them out of the way in a great hurry.

He squinted in the dimness. There was something on the floor of the stage, something dark that appeared in splotches on the floor. Mickey crouched down, grasping the side of the metal ladder that led up from the stage below. His fingers touched something warm and wet, something thicker than water.

He got to his feet, looking around at the dark expanse behind him, scanning the large speakers and boxes of old props and costumes. Somebody was up here, somebody who was hurt.

Stumbling over props and cables Mickey made his way over to the dark projection booth that jutted out of the wall. He opened the door to the booth and his knees hit the floor.

Curtis was slumped against the inside wall of the booth, blood seeped over the front of his costume. Like a child Mickey crawled towards his friend, his hero, tears spilling from his eyes as he sobbed, "Curt no...please no..." He couldn't think, couldn't do anything other than sit there like a lost child, crying as he had not cried since he was little boy, reaching out with shaking hands to touch Curtis' face.

He had done this. His own selfish stupidity had gotten his friends killed. If he had just been smarter and not gone reaching for the numbing booze then he could have...he could have...

Mickey shook his head. What could have done? Michael Myers was a killing force. He was a scrawny, awkward teenager who allowed his own father to beat him up. He wouldn't have done anything but gotten himself killed.

Better me than them, he thought. He buried his face in his hands, unable to look at Curtis as the sobs were ripped from him. He was so consumed by guilt and grief that he hadn't noticed the steady rise and fall of Curtis' chest, or the way the other boy's brown eyes opened and looked at him through half open lids.

"You big baby," Curtis said in a soft, sleepy voice.
"M'okay."

Mickey gasped and looked up in disbelief. Curtis gave him a wan smile. Relief tore through Mickey and he lunged forward, throwing his arms around Curtis, forgetting that his best friend was seriously wounded.

"Ow," Curtis winced.

"I'm sorry!" Mickey stammered, instantly backing away from him. Now that he was using his eyes properly Mickey saw that Curtis had wrapped an old sheet tightly around his torso. There were red spots of blood on it but for the most part his friend's bleeding appeared to have stopped.

"What...how did you..." Mickey still couldn't speak properly. He was still crying and he wiped at his eyes with the back of his costume's puffy sleeve.

"Just kinda crawled away," Curtis said, his voice still weak. "Think Michael's lost his touch." He grunted softly and added, "Still hurts like a bitch."

"I'm sorry," Mickey said, wanting to reach out and touch Curtis but too afraid that he'd hurt him somehow if he did so. "This is all my fault."

"Not following you Mousey."

"If I hadn't passed out-

Curtis shook his head. "He'd have gotten you too. Better me than you."

Least I can kinda handle it. Was afraid I'd lead him to you when I got the gym. I was just gonna rest up here but it...it just hurt too much." He shuddered and then asked, "Pierce and Laney okay?"

Mickey squeezed his eyes shut and forced himself to shake his head, still seeing the grotesque way their bodies had been set up in that classroom.

"Fuck," Curtis whimpered.

Mickey opened his eyes and saw that Curtis looked pained, and he wasn't entirely sure that it was from his injuries. Silently he took Curtis' big hand in his and gave it a gentle squeeze. Curtis' eyes met his and Mickey felt a tug in his soul at the tears he saw gathering in them.

"Curtis I-

"Don't," Curtis said, shaking his head softly. "No goodbyes yet. We're gonna get out of here."

Yes we are, Mickey thought fiercely. Out loud he said, "Where's Nessa?"

"Locked her in that big fridge in the kitchen," he said, blinking rapidly as he tried to hide the wetness in his eyes. "Wasn't thinking straight but I just wanted to keep her safe."

"You did," Mickey told him firmly. "I'm gonna go get help. You stay here and-" He paused, his senses on high alert. Curtis met his eyes levelly and Mickey knew that the other boy had heard it too. One of the doors in the gym had opened and as they listened both Curtis and Mickey heard the unmistakable sounds of heavy footsteps on the gym floor.

Mickey clenched his jaw grimly. There was still a chance left for them. Curtis was alive and he wasn't about to entertain the notion that Vanessa wasn't still out there somewhere. He was their last chance at getting out of here in one piece and he would be God damned if he didn't give the monster of a man a fight to remember.

"Count up," he whispered to Curtis, getting steadily to his feet.

"To what?"

"Just keep counting." All that mattered was that Curtis remained conscious. Mickey knew that if his friend slipped away for even a moment then he could be gone for good. Obediently the other boy began counting out loud from one. He gave Mickey a nod that plainly said he wouldn't be going anywhere and the other boy turned and crept out of the projector booth, his ears attuned to the sounds of the steady footfalls coming from below. He needed something, anything to use as a weapon and up here among the dusty boxes of old props and odds and ends stored by students and faculty he knew that there was a good chance of turning up something useful.

The footsteps were treading across the planked floor of the stage and as Mickey searched behind a pile of old athletic jersey's he found something that made his face light up in grim satisfaction. Just

barely audible from the projection booth he could still hear Curtis counting softly to himself and he prayed to God that his friend would keep up his numerical mantra. He just needed to find Vanessa and send her off to get help. Then he would lead Michael through the school if he had too, just to keep him away from Curtis.

Heavy steps clinked slowly up the metal of the ladder, cutting through the near silence with terrible suggestion.

A large, calloused hand rested on the floor in front of the ladder. Michael's face came into view a second later. Streaks of red descended from the socket where he'd been stabbed with the pen like crimson tears. For one second he stared into the dark expanse in front of him.

Then Mickey brought the heavy metal baseball bat he'd found among the props crashing into the top of the killer's head. He swung at the side's of Michael's face, delighting as he jerked his head to and fro at the force of the impact. Still he hung on. With a snarl of rage Mickey brought the bat down in a series of successive blows on Michael's hands, continuing to beat at his head even after he let go.

Michael teetered on the rung of the ladder for a single second. With a roar Mickey swung the bat through the air one last time and it crashed into the front of Michael's face. The killer toppled off the ladder and fell to the stage below with a satisfying crash.

Mickey stood looking down at where Michael lay below, immobile, his arms and legs at odd angles. Breathing heavily he let the bat drop, adrenaline coursing through his veins. That had felt good, far too good for such an explosive act of violence but he didn't allow himself the time to think on it.

"Curt!" He hissed through the dimness.

"Yeah?"

"I'm going to find Nessa," Mickey replied. "Stay up here and keep counting." With that Mickey turned and stepped down the ladder, glancing down every couple of rungs just to make sure that Michael hadn't moved. Once he was on the stage he crept cautiously to the killer's body, keeping a good two feet away just in case. Michael wasn't breathing and for all intents and purposes appeared to be quite dead, and with a feeling of jubilant relief Mickey realized that at his age there was very little chance that the man could come back from that kind of skull shattering beating.

If he was quick he could make it to the kitchen and get Vanessa. Mickey walked away from the body, his mind focused on his mission. After freeing Vanessa he would break into one of the faculty rooms, make her call for help and then together they would go back to the stage and stay with Curtis until help arrived.

He reached the edge of the stage, preparing to hop down when pain seared through the back of his leg. With a cry he toppled off the stage and onto the floor of the gym, scrambling backwards away from the slowly rising form of the killer he had made he mistake of turning his back on. Even through the blackness of those empty eyes Mickey could feel a primal radiation of hatred coming from the man

before him. Mickey tried to get to his feet but his leg screamed in pain and all he could do was back away like a cornered crab as Michael slowly crept down the stage, his bloody knife held in front of him.

A sea of black and orange descended from the ceiling at the exact moment Michael brought his knife down. A loud pop filled the air as the blade connected with the balloons. Mickey almost laughed. Curtis must have tripped the pulley system. Michael was slashing violently at the balloons as though enraged at their intrusion and Mickey didn't let the distraction go to waste. He got shakily to his feet, ignoring the sharp pain in his leg, turned away from the killer and, swatting at the balloons raining down from the ceiling he ran out of the gym as fast as his legs could carry him, not once slowing down or looking back.

21. Chapter 21

Down the hallway, around the corner and further on Mickey ran, not knowing where he was going but not daring to slow down. He had to get to the kitchen he knew but he wasn't about to do that with Michael on his heels. He needed time to free Vanessa and get her to safety and he had no doubt that Michael would follow him wherever he went.

After all, he'd been following Mickey throughout the whole day. As Mickey skidded to a halt behind a corner to catch his breath, clutching at a stitch in his side he had a terrible understanding of the day's events, seeing it all played out like a film in his mind's eye. The pick up truck, the man watching him and Vanessa from across the parking lot and then later through the window of his own house. He felt cold with dread at the idea that Michael had been so close to Dexter but that fear was almost instantaneously replaced by anger. Michael had scared his little brother. He had hurt Curtis.

He had to pay.

Mickey peered cautiously around the corner, fully prepared to see the behemoth stalking towards him down the dark hallway. There was nothing, nothing but the silence and the oppressive darkness. Mickey stood still, his heart pounding in his ears. He liked this silence far less than the sound of Michael's footsteps. It was too suggestive for his liking and for half a moment he expected the killer to burst out of the shadows and get him but nothing moved at either end of the hallway.

Mickey's mind set on one grim solution.

Michael must be heading to the kitchens to get Vanessa and Mickey was not about to let the son of a bitch have it all his own way. With grim determination he stole from his hiding spot and ran through the dark corridors, not even bothering to use caution or keep quiet. He had to draw Michael out, to make him leave Vanessa and even Curtis alone and if that meant being live bait then he was more than willing to do so.

He skidded to a halt as he reached the doors of the cafeteria, throwing them open and coming to a halt in the vast, deserted eating space. His leg was throbbing from where Michael had slashed at him in

the gym and his shoe was covered in blood but he paid no attention to it. For a second he stood there, catching his breath and looking around for any trace of the killer but there was nothing hiding under any of the tables or behind the soda machines.

Curtis had said that he'd made Vanessa hide in the fridge in the kitchen. Mickey walked carefully towards the serving area, completely prepared to find Michael lurking behind the buffet counter but not even a mouse made itself known as Mickey crept towards the door to the kitchen.

It was locked.

"Come on," he hissed, tugging on the knob with all his strength but it wouldn't budge. He slammed his fists against the door, shouting out Vanessa's name as loudly as he could, hoping that she'd had the sense to leave the fridge.

Nobody answered him.

Mickey looked wildly around the serving area and saw a large aluminum garbage can. It was the only thing that he had available so without a moment's hesitation he grasped it by the handles and slammed it down against the knob again and again, determined to break it down.

The knob broke off after his fifth attempt. Hastily Mickey stooped and worked the now visible lock with his bare fingers, glancing over his shoulder every other second to make sure Michael wasn't lurking anywhere behind him.

Once the bolt clicked Mickey flung the door open and stood in the empty kitchen. The first thing that met his eyes was a large pool of dark red on the floor in front of him. Looking down he saw with a gut-wrenching stab that it continued in a streak to the very spot where he stood. He glanced over his shoulder and noticed spots of blood on the floor that he hadn't when he'd been in the serving room. It didn't take a rocket scientist to know whose blood it was.

Curtis must have been in a lot of pain and Mickey felt a rushing feeling of love for the other boy. He was brave and far stronger than Mickey had ever realized. Not for the first time he sent a wild prayer to whatever was listening that Curtis would have the constitution to pull through until help arrived.

Footsteps sounded from far away. Panicked, Mickey flung open one of the drawers, rifling through the utensils until he found a long knife. Looking wildly around he dove back towards the busted open door and flattened himself around the corner. The footsteps drew closer. Mickey allowed himself to peer around the corner, his eyes fixed on that tiny little window, waiting with baited breath. All at once Michael's face appeared in the small porthole, clearly visible through the glass. The door at the opposite end of the kitchen was flung open and for one wild moment Mickey was fully prepared for the killer to charge him, but he didn't. Mickey had no idea whether or not Michael had seen him. Instead his head turned the smallest fraction of an inch to the refrigerator and somehow Mickey had the feeling that behind that impassive mask was a smile of evil triumph. There was no doubt in his mind that Michael knew that Vanessa was in there.

Mickey's blood boiled in rage. In blind anger he shouted, "MICHAEL," as loudly as he could from around the corner. Flattened against the wall he had no idea if the killer would take the bait or not. A moment later his heavy footsteps on the blood stained floor told Mickey that he had fallen for it. Silently and swiftly as he could ducked behind the serving buffet, his knife gripped tightly in his hand, his ears alert to the sound of Michael's approaching footfalls which drew closer and closer until the man was standing in the serving area.

Mickey remained crouched, his heart beating so loudly that he was surprised Michael hadn't found him. Slowly the killer walked passed the buffet, his head turning from side to side as he searched at eye level for his prey. For half a second Mickey was sure that Michael would find him and he was gripped by a wild, panicked desire to show himself and get it over with but he reeled that notion in. Vanessa was still trapped and he wasn't about to give in without getting her to safety.

Michael walked slowly to the entrance that led back into the cafeteria. He stood there momentarily, scanning the vast space ahead for any sign of the boy he sought.

The next second he staggered forward as Mickey burst out from his hiding spot behind the buffet and plunged his knife into the killer's back. A feeling of elated relief took hold of Mickey and without a pause he stabbed at Michael again and again, his knife cutting through muscle and flesh, sinking deep into the killer's body as he jerked violently around in attempt to get away from his attacker. Blood flew into the air, splattering the front of Mickey's black and white clown costume, staining his straw coloured hair as he let loose in all his fury, the knife an instrument of release as much as it was of defence.

A sound filled the air, a sound that Mickey only become aware of as he withdrew the knife from the front of Michael's body for the umpteenth time. In his crimson rage he hadn't been aware of it but now as he came back down he realized that it was his own frenzied laughter that was echoing off the walls of the cafeteria, a maniacal cackle of delight at the surge of power and the feel of blade sinking through staggered backwards, the last note of the ecstatic, half-deranged sound reverberating through the silence as Michael swayed and finally crumpled to the ground.

Mickey stared with wide eyes at his bloody, shaking hands and the scarlet stained knife. For a split second he stood there, desperately trying to convince himself that he hadn't been laughing and yet he couldn't deny that the feeling of sinking the knife into Michael had been freeing, as though all his frustrations had been unleashed through the meeting of blade and body. He closed his eyes, and tried with all his might to get a grip on himself. Michael was a monster. Michael had killed his friends. He was perfectly justified in feeling euphoric in attacking him with such violent ferocity.

He turned on his heel, still trying to bring himself around. There were more important things than his psychology at the moment. Side-stepping the pool of Curtis' blood he hurried towards the refrigerator and tugged at the metal handle.

It didn't budge.

Had she locked herself in?

"Vanessa!" He yelled, banging in the outside of the fridge as hard as he could. "Open the door! It's Mickey!" He tugged at the handle but it wouldn't move and his fingers, wet with Michael's blood, slipped against the metal surface and he couldn't get proper traction. He pounded on the door with his fists, chilled by the thought that Vanessa had simply frozen to death inside the frigid box but the next second the door was flung open and a blast of cold air hit him square in the face. Vanessa stood there, shivering in the cold, her skin pale, her lips blue. Without another word Mickey grasped her by the wrist and pulled her out of the fridge, slamming the door shut behind her. Her skin was cold to the touch.

"Are you alright?" He asked, reaching over and flicking on the element of the stove. He marched her in front of the warmth and felt somewhat relieved that she could at least move her arms out to the heat that radiated from the burner.

"T-t-totally fine," she stammered, rubbing her hands together. Mickey looked around and swiped a large, dry dish towel from a rack by the sink. He began tousling Vanessa's arms and torso, wishing she'd though better in her choice of her costume. What with her zombie makeup and pale, half frozen skin she looked like a living corpse.

Vanessa glanced down at Mickey's hands.

"Wh-wh-what h-happened to you?"

"Never mind," he said glancing over his shoulder to make sure that Michael wasn't standing behind them. Having attacked the son of a bitch at the door to the cafeteria Mickey couldn't tell if he'd gotten back up from here.

Vanessa, noticing the direction Mickey had looked, glanced at the door to the serving area. She let out a small moan at the blood on the floor.

"He's fine," Mickey told her instantly, continuing to warm her up. "I mean, he got hurt pretty bad but he's conscious." For one terrible moment he wondered if that was still the case. There was so much blood on the floor and he didn't know if Curtis would be able to hold out that long. He shook that thought off. Curtis was still alive and they were all going to make it out of here if it was the last thing he did.

Thinking of her boyfriend seemed to give Vanessa renewed strength. She shrugged off Mickey's attempts to warm her up with the dish towel and flicked off the burner. "I'm okay," she told him. "Probably won't enjoy winter as much this year but I'll live."

"You sure about that?" Mickey asked her levelly. She met his gaze and replied, "Totally," which was more than enough for him. He hooked her arm under his and, letting her lean against him more for warmth than anything else, they made their way across the kitchen to the student entrance and into the hallway beyond. Mickey glanced backwards only once just to make sure that Michael hadn't gotten up but there was nobody in the kitchen.

The added effort of helping Vanessa along meant that Mickey had to lead them back towards the gym slower than he had intended but he preferred it that way. Moving too fast could alert their presence and even though he'd driven his knife into Michael enough times to kill a normal man Mickey wasn't going to fool himself for a moment that the murderous bastard was going down that easily. He kept the knife gripped tightly in the hand that wasn't holding Vanessa against him and made sure to peer around every corner they met before walking around it.

It would be quicker to go back to the technical stage from the gym. He didn't know how advisable it would be to try one of the classrooms to get to a phone and make Vanessa call for help. The only one that he was certain was unlocked was the one where Laney, Pierce and Mr. Doyle had been set up and not only did Mickey know that seeing something that grisly would probably drive Vanessa into hysterics, he himself wasn't itching to go back there either.

They were in the hallway that intersected the foyer and led to the gym when Vanessa let go of his arm. "I'll be alright now," she said softly, her voice oddly hollow and distant. Mickey knew without even having to ask that her thoughts had turned to their friends and sure enough a moment later she asked, "What happened to the others? Pierce and Laney and Mr. Doyle?"

Mickey didn't know how to reply. He kept his eyes on the ground but somehow that seemed to be enough for Vanessa. When he happened to look back up to her he saw with a wrenching feeling in his gut that she wasn't falling apart the way he'd anticipated. She simply stood there, a numb look on her face, her blue eyes hollow.

"I'm sorry," he said softly as a new rush of guilt overwhelmed him. No matter what they said he knew that they would have stood a better chance had he not gone and gotten drunk. He could have kept tabs on everyone through the walkie-talkies, made sure that they were alright and gone to help them.

Vanessa nodded softly at him. "I know," she said quietly. "And it's not totally your fault. It's his."

Mickey nodded in response and turned to walk around the corner.

Michael stepped out from behind the wall, blocking the path in front of them. Mickey gasped and staggered backwards as Vanessa let out a scream of surprised terror. His hands oddly steady Mickey held his knife aloft, prepared to charge at the killer again but with a swipe of his long, powerful arm Michael knocked the knife out of Mickey's grasp. It clattered to the floor, several feet away.

Defenceless now against the behemoth Mickey scrambled backwards, grabbed Vanessa by the arm and tore down the hallway, back towards the foyer. Vanessa seemed to have more of an idea of where she wanted to go than he did and the second they'd cleared the wide open entrance hall she burst into an unlocked utility closet, pulling Mickey in behind her and locking it. She gave a terrified yelp a split second later when Michael's full weight thudded against the outside of the door. Desperately Mickey and Vanessa rifled through the shelves and buckets, trying to find something to use to defend

themselves against the killer outside.

Mickey felt his heart leap to his throat when the blade of Michael's knife was shoved through the door near the knob. He was stabbing through the wood, tearing chunks out of the door. Vanessa stumbled over, whether out of fear or because she'd tripped over a bucket or mop Mickey didn't know. Wildly he looked around, wishing he'd kept a better hold on his knife when Michael had surprised them. He had to make one last effort at keeping Vanessa and Curtis safe even if it was stupidly reckless. He grabbed the handle of a nearby mop and held it in front of him, preparing to ram it as hard as he could into Michael the second he got the door open.

A sizeable chunk had been taken out of the door now. Michael shoved his large hand through it and found the lock.

Mickey could scarcely breathe as the door was flung open. Michael stood in the frame, his overalls bloody, the red streaks from his eye socket staining the white like a crimson river. Without knowing how Mickey could tell that the killer no longer cared about stalking him as long as he possibly could. He was royally pissed that Mickey had been able to get the jump on him three times and Mickey knew that however the man chose to kill him it was going to be bloody and long. Behind him Vanessa whimpered, too terrified to try and put up a fight. But it didn't matter to Mickey. He would fight for her.

Mickey gripped the handle of the mop and prepared to lunge at Michael with full force when the man suddenly jerked violently to one side as something attacked him from behind with a sickening squelch. He staggered sideways and with a leap of his heart Mickey saw Curtis standing behind the killer, a fire ax gripped in his hands. He swung once more and the blade connected with Michael's side sending blood flying at Mickey. Michael fell to the ground, blood pouring from him.

Without a thought Mickey turned and pulled Vanessa to her feet. She let out a choked cry and stumbled over Michael's legs, wrapping her arms around Curtis, who let the ax fall numbly to his side. Mickey clambered out of the utility closet, took the ax from his friend's weak hand and wordlessly draped Curtis' arm over his shoulder. The other boy's face was gradually losing colour and his skin was covered in a sheen of sweat. Mickey knew that if they didn't get help soon that it would be too late for his friend.

"C'mon," Mickey said and Vanessa, understanding what he meant held gingerly but firmly onto her boyfriend's other side. Together the three of them moved as quickly down the hallway and to the front door as they could, Mickey checking on Curtis as they went. His lips were moving almost soundlessly but Mickey knew that he was still counting up, determined to keep a hold on his strength and grasp on consciousness.

Triumphantly Mickey threw the front door open, the cool night air a relief after the intensity of the chase throughout the school. They could make it to help now if Curtis could just hang on until they got across the street to one of the houses. As he helped his friends over the threshold Vanessa looked back and let out a sobbing moan.

"Oh fuck, he's up again."

Mickey looked back and saw with a sinking feeling that once more Michael was proving his resilience, staggering to his feet in spite of his injuries. Any and all fear that Mickey felt was replaced by a prickling annoyance. Why couldn't the bastard just stay dead? His fingers closed tightly around the handle of the fire ax and he envisioned himself lobbing off the killer's head, could practically hear the crunch of bone and feel the warm spray of blood.

A distant siren sounded, cutting through his morbid thoughts and Mickey felt a flicker of hope.

"Get help," he told Vanessa firmly as he stepped back into the school. The sirens were drawing close and there was no doubt in his mind that they were coming towards the school.

"Are you out of your-"

"He's after me!" Mickey told her earnestly. Already the killer was making his way down the hallway, his movements staggered. "He's been after me all day. Curtis needs help and so do you. Now go."

Vanessa stared at him, her eyes welling up but Mickey didn't have time for sentiment. "GO!" He yelled and obediently she went, Curtis leaning on her as they made their way down the lawn of the school. Mickey watched them go for only a moment before slamming the door shut behind them.

He turned, prepared to face the hell in the school...and saw the flash of steel in front of his face a moment too late.

22. Chapter 22

It had been a long, tense night for Lindsey. She'd managed to quiet Dexter and get him back to sleep in only a matter of minutes and had sincerely believed that that would be the end of her worrying but the second she'd reached the middle of the stairs and seen the door flung wide open she'd instantly gone on alert, double checking all the rooms in the house just to make sure that there wasn't anybody there who shouldn't be.

The light being flicked off in the kitchen had been something she tried quite hard to attribute to the bulb going but after seeing the front door open she knew full well what had happened. Michael had been inside the house, most likely feet away from her. It made Lindsey feel cold with dread but she didn't allow herself to think too much on it. He was gone for the time being and had obviously just wanted to intimidate her. Still, she wasn't going to take any chances at being caught off guard again. She rifled through the cupboards, pulling out pots and pans and setting them up precariously at the edge of the front and back doors. Anything or anyone that tried sneaking in again would have a tough time doing it quietly.

She turned the volume of the television off as well and sat in the corner arm chair, her gun secured firmly in her hand, her eyes and ears alert in the semi-darkness, scanning the front window for even the smallest flash of white mask. If necessary she would keep her vigil until the break of dawn, although she really hoped that Mickey's parents would be back by then.

She'd already made up her mind that she wouldn't be stepping down even when Mickey returned from the dance and subsequent clean up. There was far too much at stake and it would be a long way off until sunrise even by that point, assuming he did come back. There was always the possibility that his friends would try and convince him to put off returning to his parents as long as possible, not that she blamed them in the least.

An hour passed...then two...Lindsey glanced at the clock and when it was nearly eleven and felt a sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach. The dance ended at nine and it really wouldn't have taken them that long to do a tear down would it? _They're teenagers_, she thought to herself half-convincingly. They might have been able to give the slip to whoever on the faculty was in charge of watching them for a bit of Halloween fun except...except she knew that Mickey and his friends weren't like that. They did enjoy a good time but never anything too overdone.

Something didn't add up about the whole situation and a prickly of instinct in the back of Lindsey's mind told her that she needed to be at the school more than she needed to be at the Morris house.

It was just a shame that Mickey's parents were partying lushes who didn't believe in taking proper care of their children.

Please God let them be driving drunk, Lindsey thought savagely as she glanced at the late night slasher movie playing in the television. She would just love an excuse to see Alan and Olivia behind bars even if it was just for the night. Still she wouldn't leave Dexter by himself even for the ten minutes it would take to drive to the school and back, especially since Michael had already made it into the house once.

She heard the sound of a car pulling up in front of the house but there was no glare of headlights to give any other indication of a vehicle. Tensely Lindsey rose from her seat, gripping her gun steadily as she crept towards the front door. She could hear footsteps just beyond, coming up the steps. She raised the gun, pointing it directly at the door, her finger hovering just over the trigger, prepared to blast the stark white mask of Michael's face the second he opened the door.

The lock clicked.

The door creaked open and the little pile of dishes Lindsey had made toppled to the ground with a clatter. A woman shrieked and then burst into a fit of giggles just as the light came on and Lindsey grimaced, stowing her gun back in it's holster although she itched to fire at least a warning shot over the heads of Alan and Olivia Morris, who stood in the front hallway giggling like schoolchildren, their faces red.

"Look Alan!" Olivia snickered, readjusting her skewed glasses. "Police officer people!" She swayed for a moment and then backed against the door, giggling like an idiot. Alan swaggered up to Lindsey with a greasy grin and said, "What seems to be the officer problem?"

Lindsey glared up at him and resisted the urge to sock him in the

nose with immense difficulty. "That's Sheriff Wallace," she reminded him icily. "And that better have been a designated driver that dropped you off."

"I'm smart!" Olivia laughed, pulling her glasses off and putting them back on again. "Look at me smart Alan!"

"We drove home," Alan said forcefully. "I think we hit a cat or a kindergartener if that helps." He let out a whoop of laughter and Lindsey glared even harder at him.

"I'd keep it down if I were you," she advised them. "Your son already woke up once tonight."

"Oh no!" Olivia moaned in a sing-song voice, smacking her hand against her face. "I left Mickey alllllll alone with Dexter."

"Yeah you kinda did," Lindsey said, pinning her with a filthy look. "For about ten minutes your three year old was home by himself. That counts as child endangerment in some law books."

"I'm sorry pudding," Olivia slurred, slumping against the wall. Alan, who had remained silent during this little exchange frowned, as though suddenly remembering where they were and asked, "Hey what exactly are you doing here Sheriff Lindsey?"

"Baby-sitting the toddler you so charmingly left behind," Lindsey said tersely.

"But Mickey was supposed to do that!" Olivia insisted with a whine.

"Mickey went to help clean up the dance," Lindsey replied, wincing at the childish way in which the other woman complained.

"That little bastard," Alan said angrily, his face flushing red. "I can't fucking believe he'd go and do something so goddamn-"

"What? Irresponsible?" Lindsey cut him off bluntly, crossing her arms over her chest and glowering up at the half-drunk man in front of her. She gave a hollow laugh and said, "The way I see it the two of you have more to learn about what it means to be responsible for somebody than your son does. He was here, taking care of your youngest child while you two were out getting hammered."

Alan stared at her with an ugly, furious look that Lindsey returned with interest. On the floor Olivia sat with her head resting against the wall, staring into space, a vacant, tired expression on her face but somehow Lindsey could tell that the bitch was taking it to heart. She didn't care if she upset them. She was so goddamn tired of these two and she almost hoped that Alan would try getting physical so she could have an excuse to take them in.

Instead, dumbly the man only repeated, "That little bastard," and stalked into the living room.

"There's only one bastard in this house Alan!" Lindsey called out but to his credit he completely ignored her. She could hear him rummaging around in the kitchen, evidently looking for more booze.

"Oh and by the way Livvie," Lindsey said, crouching next to Mickey's mother, who closed her eyes as though she expected to be struck at any moment, "if I were you I wouldn't let Mickey leave the house with a black eye again. It sends the wrong impression to the right people." Olivia flinched but Lindsey only flashed her a sweet-as-honey smile and stepped around her and out the door, feeling a small glow of triumph. Goaded the two pathetic excuses for parents was a small victory but it was a victory nonetheless.

Still she felt her unease rise as she walked the short distance to the cruiser. She half expected to find another pumpkin or at least some kind of grim reminder that Michael had been in the house in or on her car but there was nothing. Something about the sheer absence of any sort of message from Michael set off a chain reaction of reasoning in Lindsey's mind.

Michael had broken into the house. That much she knew. He'd been in the kitchen within easy striking distance. Even when she'd been upstairs with Dexter she would have been too distracted to put up resistance to some kind of surprise attack but the son of a bitch had left the house as quickly as he'd entered, and through the front door no less.

Why?

Frantically Lindsey searched through her memory for some kind of clue. Dexter's room was at the end of the hall closest to the stairs. Anyone standing by the front door would hear any noise from within...and in her efforts to soothe the little boy she had sealed his older brother's doom.

She'd let Michael know exactly where to find the victim he sought.

Her heart pounding in her ears Lindsey gunned the engine and took off down the street, reaching for the CB on the dashboard.

"This is Sheriff Wallace," she said urgently as she sped down the dark road, "requesting immediate back-up to Haddonfield High School. And an ambulance," she added for good measure. There was a drawn out pause and for one terrible moment she was afraid that dispatch hadn't received the broadcast but a moment later she got a response.

"Copy that Sheriff."

Lindsey kept her eyes focused firmly on the road, trying as hard as she could to keep any and all thoughts of what could have happened to Mickey and his friends. Mickey was infuriatingly stubborn but Lindsey knew that when push came to shove the kid could damn well hold his own, which was why she knew his no good father was constantly going after him.

She passed through a deserted intersection and sped along down to the high school, the sirens blaring through the quiet of the night, shattering Haddonfield's peace once more. The high school was in sight and Lindsey felt her heart leap in anticipation. She was going to make it and she was going to put a stop to Michael Myers once and for all. There was no room in her mind for doubt. Something on the sidewalk made her hit the breaks and skid to a halt. As fast as she could Lindsey flung the door open and hastened to the asphalt where

two teenagers were limping away from the school, both plainly visible in the flashing lights of her cruiser.

"Oh my God," Lindsey said under her breath as she jogged towards them. She knew these two. Mickey's friends Vanessa Penner and Curtis Wryst, both costumed, both looking as though they'd just seen the inner level of Hell.

"Please!" Vanessa half sobbed as Lindsey drew level with them. "Please help us!" The girl's skin was starkly pale. To Lindsey's horror she saw that Curtis' entire front was covered in blood and he seemed barely conscious, his head tilted to one side. The sirens of the back up and ambulance she'd requested were drawing closer.

"Stay by the cruiser," Lindsey told them, helping Curtis along. "The paramedics will be here soon."

"You've gotta help Mickey," Vanessa moaned, looking back at the school. "He's in there...he's in there with him...th-the boogeyman's gonna kill Mickey."

"Not if I can help it," Lindsey said grimly as an ambulance sped towards them. She pulled her gun out of it's holster and marched determinedly towards the school. She felt a stew of emotions as she ran the short distance to the dark and silent building, sirens filling the air behind her. Fear, determination and an odd feeling of nostalgia, as though she'd lived this night before. She had of course but that had been from a completely different perspective. She wasn't the terrified, cowering little girl anymore. She was the protector, the Laurie Strode, the Samuel Loomis and this time she was going to make sure that Michael didn't get up for round two.

Without any hesitation Lindsey burst through the front doors of the school, her gun held firmly in front of her, determined to meet the monster head on.

Pain blinded Mickey as he staggered through the school, trying with all his might to get away from his pursuer. He hadn't been fast enough to dodge the knife as it had sliced through the air. A blinding, stinging pain had erupted across his face and blood swam in front of his eyes. Blindly he swung out with the fire ax only to have it violently yanked out of his hand. Blinking blood out of his eyes he saw Michael throw the ax across the entrance hall. Panic seized hold of Mickey and he turned and ran without knowing where he was going, tripping over his own feet as he tried to see through the blood clouding his vision.

Curtis must have been too weakened to do any serious damage to the killer when he'd had used the ax because Michael showed no sign of slowing down as he pursued Mickey up the stairs and through the halls. The boy was running completely on adrenaline, not knowing where he could go to escape but not really caring.

Dimly he heard the sound of the front door opening from below but he didn't look to see who had come on. It didn't matter to him anymore. His friends had made it to safety. If Michael got him then at least he wouldn't get Curtis and Vanessa.

Without thinking Mickey stumbled down the science wing, completely aware of the approaching footsteps behind him. He had to lead Michael

on, to try and get somewhere that neither of them would stand much of a chance. Mickey burst through a large red door at the end of the hallway, clinging to the rungs as he made the steep climb up a ladder to a trap door. Just because he wasn't fighting back anymore didn't mean he was going to give in all that easily. If Michael wanted him he would have to work for it. With all his force Mickey pushed on the door, looking behind him at the dark space behind but Michael hadn't yet caught up to him. He could still hear the killer's footsteps but he wasn't out of danger yet. With a grunt Mickey threw his shoulder into the door which burst open at the force. He scrambled through the opening and slammed the door shut behind him.

Cool air prickled his skin and for a moment he simply stood on the roof of the building, gulping in the air, his heart hammering in his chest. Gingerly he touched the long gash on his face, hissing at the sting as he traced the bloody line from his forehead along the bridge of his nose and over the side of his lip. Thankfully Michael hadn't managed to slash at his eyes.

His legs wobbling Mickey turned and saw with a feeling of relief that there was a cluster of police cars and an ambulance at the very end of the drive that led up to the parking lot. Curtis and Vanessa would be okay now.

He took several shaky steps away from the trap door, walking around the various outcroppings of ventilation chimneys and coolant pipes, wondering how he would get down from here without jumping. He'd never been up to the roof before and this far removed from everything below he felt oddly at peace, almost sleepy.

As he reached the large span of glass that was the gym's skylight he heard something creak in the wind but he was too tired, his mind too fuzzy with exhaustion to turn around. It was only when a strong, bloody hand gripped him by the shoulder that his flight or fight response kicked in. He made a desperate attempt to put one foot in front of the other but it was too late. His attacker spun him around and Mickey found himself looking into those empty, black eyes once more as Michael wrapped his hands around his throat and applied a tremendous pressure to Mickey's windpipe.

Mickey gasped for air, trying violently to struggle out of the killer's grip as the very life was squeezed out of him. His vision swam and he saw the faces of everyone he knew and had ever known; Vanessa and Curtis, his baby brother, Laney and Pierce and Mr. Doyle and even his parents and somehow he knew that there would be no miraculous rescue...

The loud, sudden sound of a gunshot tore through the air and Michael's grip faltered as his body spasmed in surprised pain. Five consecutive shots followed and the killer relinquished his grasp on Mickey's throat. The boy fell to the ground like a rag doll, gasping for air and shrunk away from the shape before him. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Sheriff Wallace, standing over the very trap door he had crawled out of, reloading another clip into her gun. Unflinchingly she fired six more shots into Michael's body. The killer swayed where he stood, blood pouring out of him and in that singular instant Mickey knew that even this barrage of gunfire wouldn't stop him for good. With a feral roar of unhinged fury Mickey threw himself at Michael, wrapping his arms around the bastard's chest as he charged forward, propelling them through the skylight

which shattered with an ear-shattering crash of broken glass, leaving the sheriff staring in stunned silence as the boogeyman and the boy plunged into darkness.

23. Chapter 23

Death. It wasn't something Michael had ever prepared himself for. Age was one thing but the idea of meeting his end, of being snuffed out the way that he extinguished the lights of others wasn't a reality he had ever expected to face. He was death's right hand, a perpetrator, never a victim of it and yet as he lay on the hard floor of the gymnasium, surrounded by broken glass with his body open with more wounds than he'd ever sustained he realized with an awful, shuddering finality that he was facing his imminent end.

He couldn't move. The fall had broken something, physically and mentally. The lower half of his body felt numb and although he tried to move his legs he found that they weren't responding. When at first he tried moving his torso he felt scores of pain all over his body, from his gaping eye socket to the notches in his back and side and every deep puncture inflicted upon him by the sheriff's bullets and the boy's frantic, frenzied stabbing.

The boy...

Michael lolled his head to the side and saw through his swimming vision that the boy had been able to recover from the fall quite fast. He was sitting cross legged a few feet away from where Michael's broken body lay, his eyes glinting in the weak light, his face shining with blood from the slash Michael had carved into it.

There was a hollow, almost dead look on the boy's face and as Michael gazed levelly at him he remembered a similar look on the face of Laurie the night he'd come for her at the hospital. She'd had nothing left to lose that night and had been broken straight down to her spirit with only one burning drive to keep her going: killing Michael once and for all.

He'd been fortunate enough that night to have outsmarted her but Michael knew that there would be no fatal flaw on the boy's part the way there had been on Laurie's. There was too much of a fight in those eyes to simply give up on sheer sentiment.

And it frightened him. The fact that he was in this vulnerable, completely open position that so many of his victims had been in when he'd taken their lives scared him. The little boy wanted to run, to hide somewhere and come out when it was all over and play the way he wanted to again. Michael waited for the seeping shadows to overtake that pathetic, cowardly emotion but for the first time in his long and bloody life the darkness did not come.

He was Michael Myers, plain and simple, weakened and at the mercy of one whose life he had thirsted for. It was a startling, terrifying realization and somehow pained him more than any other injury he had thus far sustained. There was no darkness to hide behind, no deep seeded evil to mask what he had become. For the first time he wished his mask to be removed, to be able to feel free of the horrible legacy that he had carved into the very world he had tried so

desperately to lash out at but he could not move his arms to peel back the heavy, uncomfortable latex that stuck to his face like a second skin.

Slowly the boy pushed himself to his feet and retreated into the surrounding darkness, his footsteps crunching heavily over the glass that littered the floor. For one simple moment Michael truly believed that the boy was leaving him to die of his wounds but a second later he understood that he wouldn't be escaping his well deserved fate that easily. The boy emerged from the shadows, a silver clown mask over his eyes, the silver of the knife that had fallen out of Michael's overalls during the fall flashing in the boy's hand as he slowly, methodically walked towards Michael, whose laborious breathing increased in anticipating dread.

For a moment the boy stood over him, looking down from behind his mask, his head cocked curiously to one side. He stooped, grasping the coarse hairs of Michael's mask and peeled it from his face in one violent motion that jerked Michael's head forward. His skin was exposed to the cool air of the gym, breathing in the clean oxygen seemingly as though starved of it his whole life. The boy's mouth fell into a frown and his brows furrowed in what Michael could only assume was disappointment at what he had found behind the mask.

Slowly he sank to a crouch, his eyes never leaving Michael's who felt spellbound by the gaze, unable to look away as something alien welled up inside of him at the sight of this masked boy, something that resembled a sick sort of awed pride. Here at long last in front of him was his match, a soul that seemed simpatico with his own. Throughout that whole day of following and observing he'd felt a pull, a kinship with the boy for reasons he couldn't understand. Now as the boy's hand touched his own Michael truly understood that in this boy there lived a darkness as profound as his own, buried beneath happiness among friends. This boy had things surrounding him that kept him from jumping from that precipice that Michael had long ago fallen from. Now, all thanks to him, the boy had next to nothing left. Michael had shaken that security, shifted it, leaving behind only the darkness which he saw staring at him from the eyes of the silver mask, empty as his own had been.

His fingers laced with the boy's.

The boy raised the knife, his eyes never leaving Michael's, and brought the blade plunging down into Michael's heart, pushing it through sinew and organ down to the handle. Michael gurgled as blood filled his throat, his fingers tightening around the boy's who did not break contact as he pulled the knife out of Michael's chest. Again he brought it down, his mouth set in a savage line as he continued to stab at the body beneath him, blood spattering his costume in once more, staining the silver of his mask.

The pain was absolute, overwhelming all other senses but still Michael would not allow himself to cry out against it.

Finally after one last brutal plunge into his chest the boy removed the knife for good, letting it fall listlessly to his side as he continue to gaze down at the dying body before him. Michael gave the boy's hand one final, crushing squeeze before he let his fingers fall away, too weak to continue hanging on.

Blackness encroached his eyesight and for one infinite moment he could see the faces of everyone he had ever hunted in that of the masked boy before him-Judith, Laurie, Samuel Loomis, the two frightened children Laurie had protected that night, Laurie's ill-fated friends-all of them a shimmer of one final, impassive masked face. He wanted to reach out to them but could not and never would. They were in a place far removed from where he was descending.

His breath caught in his throat in one final, cold rattle. And then at long last the blackness claimed Michael Myers in it's endless fold, and this time it did not let him go.

Lindsey skidded to a halt as she burst through the gym doors. There was glass everywhere, pellets littering the far edge of the gym while in the dead centre where Mickey and Michael had fallen through the skylight large, jagged chunks tessellated the floor like a lethal geometry project.

In the light cast from the plastic pumpkins on the stage she could see Mickey standing in front of something on the ground, his head bowed as he looked down at the thing in front of him.

As Lindsey hurried towards the boy a glint of steel in the light caught her eye and as she drew level with him she realized that Mickey was holding onto a bloody kitchen knife. Cautiously she approached him, her hand on her gun just in case.

"Mickey?" She said softly.

He didn't reply but lifted his head up and turned to her. Lindsey felt her heart flutter inexplicably as she saw that he had pulled a silver mask over his bloody face. His eyes shone at her in the dimness but there was something strange about them, something different that made her feel oddly uneasy. This was Mickey, she told herself firmly. Mickey Morris, who had time and time again rebuffed her offers of interference and help with a biting sarcasm and a boyish smile. She had nothing to fear from him and yet as she held that gaze of his she could not repress a sliver of chilling horror. There was something more than hollow in his eyes, something that did not hold the finiteness of dead but something that still had the look of death to it.

They were empty...soulless almost.

"A-are you alright?" Lindsey asked, more for something to say to fill the silence. He gave a short, curt nod that did little to alleviate her trepidation. Slowly he lowered his head to look at the knife in his hand and then back up at Lindsey, an almost curiosity written on what little of his face that she could see. Lindsey's hand tightened instinctively around the handle of her gun and for one frantic second she felt a wild desire to actually shoot the boy in front of her, to rid herself and possibly the world of his danger.

For an endless moment he held her in his awful, empty gaze, he with his hand around his knife, she still gripping the metal of her gun, still warm from the shots she had fired on the roof. Then, without tearing his eyes from hers, Mickey dropped the knife. It clattered to the floor beneath them, the metallic clatter echoing through that

vast and empty gym. Silently he turned and began to walk away.

"Mickey!" Lindsey said in alarm, desperate to call him back but he did not turn around. He walked calmly out of the gym, his feet echoing heavily on the floor and fragments of glass. Her throat constricted with dread Lindsey watched him go, not knowing what to do, feeling once more like a helpless child. She had been prepared for anything but this, this sudden, soul-sucking loss of the gregarious, compassionate boy that she had known.

He was in shock, she tried to make herself think. That was all. He would come around again...or at least she hoped he would.

She looked down at the thing on the floor and felt her heart jump. Drawn by a sick curiosity Lindsey drew closer, kneeling on the floor the better to see the face, the actual face of the man that had terrorized her as a child and taunted her in her adult life.

This couldn't be right.

In spite of the gaping black socket that had been oozing blood and the broken, bloody nose Michael's face, the face of a killer, was completely unremarkable. It was uncanny and Lindsey almost felt sick at the sight of it. She had expected, almost wanted some grotesque deformity to at least complete the image of the monster that had been scarred into her memory but this...it was almost unfair.

He had a softness to his face, with full lips that were now growing pale. A wild scrub of beard covered his jaw. Thick and long light brown hair streaked liberally with grey fell fanned out behind his head. His one good eye was open, staring endlessly at the ceiling and even with the minimal light Lindsey could see that there was no empty, maddening chasm of blackness. His eye was brown, the flickering light just catching the ochre and distinguishing it from the rest of the iris.

He was almost handsome...

Scowling Lindsey reached a shaking finger out and closed the lid. He looked at peace with his eye closed but that only made her all the more aggravated. Michael did not deserve peace, he deserved eternal damnation for all that he had taken from the world.

Without thinking Lindsey cocked her gun, pressed the barrel firmly against the corpse's forehead and pulled the trigger, closing her eyes at the spray of blood and gore, the shot echoing through the gym.

Grimly Lindsey wiped her face off with the back of her hand and stared contemptuously down at the bullet blasted skull of the thing that had once been Michael Myers.

"That was for Laurie," she spat at the corpse. Then she turned in her heel and walked out of the gym, back out into the halls of the school, leaving Michael behind, a mangled corpse on the floor.

Darkness was everywhere, outside of him and inside of him. He didn't feel trapped or suffocated by it. He felt a part of it, without any notion of it being final, like a second skin that seeped just below the surface, sinking thorny tendrils into his muscles, slicking his blood with blackness. It was terrifying and comforting, powerful and almost barely there. He could take it off at any moment, much like his costume but he didn't want too.

He liked this feeling too much to want to strip it off.

There were bright lights outside of the school, flashing as people milled about and cars pulled up. Cameras were being affixed to tripods as the ambulance chasers prepared for their news reels. It hadn't even been half an hour since the police had arrived on the scene but in a town like Haddonfield news travelled fast.

He avoided the street, keeping to the dark sidewalk as he walked calmly through the night, his mask still covering his eyes, blocking out some of the glare. Lights were being thrown on in the houses nearest the school, alerted by the sirens and blinking lights of the squad cars but he didn't bother shirking away from these barely touching specks of light. He had no reason to hide himself from these people because they would know him by sight as a typical teenager. He walked on through the night, away from these alerted homes and to the dark streets of the less residential areas, passed shops and intersections normally steady with life during daylight hours now deserted and silent as the witching hour approached.

Somewhere underneath his slick of darkness he registered that he should be feeling pain from all of the injuries he had sustained back in the school but there was nothing, not even a sting from his cuts. He was above pain, an agent of it not a victim. Never a victim.

Never again.

The street of his family home was dark and still. The news would not spread here until morning when the whole of the town woke to find their facetious peace shattered once again. Whatever jack-o-lanterns that hadn't been extinguished by the wind were now burning low, the lights of their eyes observing his slow, careful walk along the dark sidewalk.

There was a light on in the upstairs window. They were still awake. Having left the house key in his book bag he stooped at the front entrance and overturned the fake rock on the concrete steps, retrieving the key and unlocking the door as quietly as he possibly could. The ground floor rooms were dark and deserted but the house was anything but silent. Even from down here he could hear the melodramatic moans and groans of ecstasy coming from up the stairs. Like a shadow he moved easily through the darkness of the living room, stealing into the kitchen where he retrieved a kitchen knife. For a moment he stood there, examining the shiny blade. It wasn't as large as the one that the man had used back at the school but it was still long enough and sharp enough to suit his purpose.

He crept out of the kitchen and silently mounted the stairs, impervious to the continued sounds of their love-making. It would all be over for them soon enough anyway.

He paused just outside their bedroom door which stood clumsily ajar. From his vantage point he could clearly see them, brazenly above the covers, his father's backside thrusting into his mother's body beneath, grunting in primitive satisfaction as her hands grasped at his naked flesh. He knew he should be disgusted or angry or embarrassed but such things were no longer a part of his emotional vocabulary. There was nothing more than the numbing, masking darkness and that was all that he needed. He lingered just beyond the edge of the doorframe, his eyes never leaving the carnal scene before him, his hand gripping the knife tightly.

His father gave a dramatic groan, his hips bucking spastically before he came to a shuddering halt. Stealthily and unobserved the shape in the door crept to the door of the bathroom across the hall from the bedroom, his ears attuned to the muffled sounds of post-coital conversation from the next room. Carefully, maneuvering through the darkness he stepped behind the shower curtain and into the shower, breathing slowly and steadily as he watched through the semi-opaque material.

A moment later the door opened and then closed and the light was switched on. He saw the blurry form of his father, still undressed, stand in front of the sink and turn the faucet on. He waited the smallest of seconds for the man to cup the rushing water in his hands and scrub his face before he slid out from behind the shower curtain and stepped behind him.

When his father caught sight of him in the mirror his expression changed from startled to confused to angry in the space of a second but before the man could so much as turn around the masked shape behind him grabbed him by the hair, craned his neck back and slid the blade of the knife across his throat. His father's eyes bugged out in surprised pain as a line of blood spread across his neck, dripping onto his bare chest. He stumbled around and clutched desperately at the front of his son's costume, staring imploringly into the empty, black eyes behind the mask, searching for a trace of mercy that he did not receive. With a gurgle he fell to the cold, tiled floor of the bathroom, blood seeping from his neck as his attacker stood over him and cocked his head to the side curiously. The man had been snuffed out so quickly, so easily that he almost find the earlier fear he'd had of him pitiful. If he'd known that it would have been this easy he would had killed the bastard a long time ago.

Stepping over the body he walked quietly back into the hallway, closing the bathroom door behind him as he went. He could hear faint, gentle singing coming from the master bedroom and as he walked to the door he could see his mother sitting at the vanity table with her back to him, her bare skin still flushed in the afterglow of her recent tryst. She was brushing her long hair out, focused intently on her own reflection in the mirror, completely unaware of all that had taken place in the room across the hall.

He did not hesitate in his approach, his feet barely making any noise as he approached her. It was only when he was a foot or so away that she was finally aware of his presence in the room. She turned to look at him, anger and irritation on her face at his intrusion. She hastened to cross her arms over her chest, shielding her bare breasts from his view. "Mickey!" She said indignantly. The next second she screamed as he brought the knife down into her body, scrambling off the chair but it did no good. Again and again he continued to

mercilessly plunge the knife into her exposed flesh, blood pouring down her body as her attempts to escape become more feeble. Finally she collapsed to the floor in a pool of her own blood, her head lolling to one side as life ebbed from her.

He stood over her, the knife still clutched in his hand as it dripped blood onto the carpet of the bedroom. Something inside of him was stirring, roused by the savagery of the kill. The darkness, which had at first only served as a layer was seeping over everything else, overpowering the part of him that had moved rationally with his own broken mind. It wanted more blood, more fear and it knew that there was still one life left to snuff out in the house. He turned, the shadows closing in on all thought and attempts at resistance, and walked away from his mother's body and out of the bedroom. He stalked down the hallway and to the room near the stairs, pushing the bedroom door open quietly and stepping into the tidy little room.

A night light was on, casting it's pale bluish glow over a dresser mounted with all kinds of stuffed animals that watched his approach into the room with knowing, beady eyes. He stepped across a floor mat decorated like a cartoonish city map towards the low bed where a small figure slept, his thick blonde hair messy against a fluffy space themed pillow. His cherubic face was peaceful in his sleep but as the shape by the bed raised the knife with all intents of bringing it down in one quick, brutal movement the child stirred and opened his eyes to stare up at him. At first he looked confused then, as wakefulness overtook him he sat up, still peering at his would-be killer and said in a small, confused voice, "Mousey?"

The shape froze, the knife still held aloft. Something inside of him was screaming, something that was rapidly clawing at the inky darkness as the little boy continued to stare up at him without a trace of fear in his big green eyes.

The child reached out a hand and touched the killer's.

In a single instant the darkness was swept away with the force of a hurricane as feeling returned to the teenaged boy that it had taken hold of. Memories played on fast forward, memories of a bawling baby, a happy little brother in an astronaut's costume; of friends laughing and showing him that he was important and that he mattered. He saw Vanessa and Curtis making it to safety, terrified at having to leave him behind because they cared that much. And lastly he saw his little brother, sitting up in front of a knife wielding killer with as much fear as if he were some kind of unusual moth.

The knife shook in his hand and fell to the floor of Dexter's bedroom and a second later Mickey's knees followed it as horrendous guilt at what he had been about to do, what he'd almost allowed himself to become hit him like a freight train. He felt it all at once, the soreness from the fall, the stinging on his face and numbness of his leg but none of that compared to the biting, unbearable guilt. Tears fell from his eyes and he sobbed like a lost child, his head down. He felt Dexter's little hand grip he edge of the clown mask and pull it off but still he couldn't bear to look at him. He had almost...he couldn't even stand thinking about it.

Wordlessly Dexter wrapped his arms around Mickey's neck, hugging him tightly as he continued to sob.

"Why're you crying Mousey?" Dexter asked.

"Cuz," Mickey choked out, "I love you Dex."

Dexter ran a hand over Mickey's blood stained shoulder and cocked his head to the side inquisitively. "Are you hurt Mousey?"

Mickey almost laughed at the innocence of his little brother. He shook his head and pulled himself out of Dexter's hug. "Not anymore," Mickey told him, wiping his eyes the back of his costume's sleeve, working hard to get his sobs under control. He glanced over his shoulder, half-expecting to see his mother or father standing in the doorway with one last ounce of fight in them but there was nothing but the hallway beyond. He didn't want to stay here anymore and certainly didn't want Dexter to either. They had to get away and there was only one likely place that Mickey could think to take them to.

"Listen buddy," he began, looking Dexter in the eye as he spoke, "we've gotta go somewhere for a little bit okay? Just for a while so I can see how my friends are doing."

"Are Mommy and Daddy coming with?" Dexter asked with an inquisitive blink.

"No Dexter," Mickey told him softly. "They're not coming with us...ever again."

Dexter frowned, as if trying to process the information. A hard look came over his little face and he said in a voice shockingly bitter for one so young, "Good. I don't like Mommy and Daddy." Then, before Mickey could think of how to reply Dexter gave a prodigious yawn, rubbing tiredly at his eyes. Once more he wrapped his arm around Mickey's neck, settled his head on his older brother's shoulder, and fell asleep.

For a moment Mickey simply sat there, feeling strangely surreal. A part of him, and it was a very slim part, wanted to do the right thing and call the police. But he wouldn't. They would take Dexter away from him and the very thought of that made the darkness lick at his insides. Nobody was going to get between him and the things that made him happy ever again.

A siren sounded in the distance.

The hospital...he needed to make sure that Curtis was okay. Taking a deep, stabilizing breath he got to his feet, supporting Dexter who with an arm. Thoughtfully he scooped up a blanket and wrapped his brother in it. Drawn by it for some inexplicable reason he grabbed his clown mask and stowed it in the pocket of his costume. Then, leaving the knife on the floor he left the bedroom and went back into the hallway. There was a pool of blood seeping out from under the bathroom door but he didn't linger long enough to observe. Still holding Dexter protectively he walked down the stairs and out the front door, back into the dark Halloween night, never once looking back at the house.

Evil had lived in Michael Myers for fifty years, festering inside of him like a disease, poisoning his veins with a darkness that blackened his eyes.

It had lived in Mickey Morris for less than an hour and there had been too much love in his life to have let the darkness completely consume him.

But it was still there if he needed it and who was he to let it be extinguished since it had served him so well? The shadow of Michael Myers would never linger over Haddonfield again because of that darkness, because of Mickey.

Halloween was his now.

25. Epilogue

The staff at Haddonfield New Memorial Hospital were tense, going about their duties fearfully as groups of police officers kept watch at every entrance and exit. News reporters and curious citizens were making inquiries of the beleaguered staff and as Lindsey watched it all she felt the weight of that day's events bear down on her with a crushing immensity. She felt exhausted and knew getting off her feet would do her a world of good but she wasn't in the mood to rest.

It was after midnight and for all intents and purposes Halloween was over. There was no chance of Michael Myers forcing entry into the hospital as the police and staff feared but Lindsey wasn't about to go the entire stretch in explaining it all again. She'd already had to fill Keith in on the events of the whole day. He'd taken over her duties when she'd been babysitting Dexter and had listened stunned as she'd told him all that she knew.

Unfortunately all that she knew had been scant compared to what had gone on inside of the high school. Two students had been murdered and set up in a grisly tableaux along with a teacher.

Lindsey felt pained when she remembered how they'd found Tommy Doyle and those two teenagers. It had been macabre and there was no doubt in her mind that Mickey had born witness to the horrors of that classroom. Michael had set it up expressly for his victim after all.

And Tommy...she didn't have the heart to tell anybody to contact his wife and as for his daughter well...Jamie would be destroyed by it. Lindsey herself felt numb just thinking about her childhood friend. It pissed her off to think that Tommy had lived and accomplished so much just to be snuffed out by the monster they'd both escaped from. Just like Laurie.

It wasn't fair.

She took a calming breath as she thought about Tommy again. What mattered was that Michael Myers was finally dead and Haddonfield for the first time in thirty-five years could rest peacefully.

Or at least it would when the residents recovered from this most recent massacre.

Lindsey could still hear the mournful wails of Pierce Matheson's mother who was slumped almost lifelessly in a chair in the waiting room. There was so much damage control to be done and she wasn't sure

she would be able to handle it. The personal aspect of crime fighting had never been her strongest suit when she'd been in Chicago and this case in particular hit too close to home for her.

Besides there was still Mickey to worry about. Lindsey shivered as she thought about the hollow, empty look that she'd seen in the kid's eyes before he'd left the gym. He'd seemed like a shell, a husk of what he had been but she wouldn't allow herself to think on the thought that itched in the back of her mind. Mickey had been through an undeniable hell. He was just in shock. Hopefully he would have enough sense to come to the hospital when he finally came around.

Sighing, she turned and made to leave the waiting area. The elevator from the lower floor dinged open and out of the corner of her eye Lindsey saw Keith exiting. He'd been called away twenty minutes ago, for what Lindsey hadn't had the energy to inquire about but judging from the look in his eye he had something important to discuss with her. She slowed her pace but didn't stop, not wanting to hang around in the waiting area anymore where so many accusing stares were being thrown her way. She wanted to tell them, Pierce's parents and Laney's family, that she had tried as hard as she could to prevent disaster and that Michael had just been too fast but she couldn't. They wouldn't understand.

As she walked down the corridor Keith drew level with her and fell into step beside her. For a moment they walked together in silence, their footsteps echoing down the hallway. Then Keith said, "So what's it looking like?" It was a pleasantry and one that she found too suggestive for her tastes but she didn't have the heart to resist.

"Curtis is out of OR and in intensive care," she replied. Miraculously the boy's injuries hadn't been as severe as the doctors had feared but he had lost quite a lot of blood. "He's stable," Lindsey added for Keith's benefit, "but only just so."

"And the girl?"

"Vanessa's perfectly fine," she replied. "They took her to the therapeutic hot tub, gave her a warm blanket and a cup of soup. But they want to keep her overnight for observation. She's...she's sort of in shock."

Keith nodded as they turned a corner that lead to the ICU where Curtis was being treated. "That's good," he said. "That's...that's really good." He paused and Lindsey felt an urge to slap him in the face and tell him to get on with it but again she was too tired. Keith, seemingly reading her mind took a deep breath as though stealing himself to spill the beans and said, "That dispatch...it was a call for a place down on Pleasence Street."

Lindsey felt her heart sink. Pleasence Street was where Mickey's house was and she prayed that the call had been him snapping out of his stupor and just phoning in for help. "What happened?" She asked him resignedly.

"Well someone thought they heard screaming at the Morris house and when we went to investigate we...we found Alan and Olivia Morris, both dead."

Lindsey stopped moving, her knees suddenly feeling weak as the dark thought in the back of her brain grew. She felt suddenly sick and opened her mouth to inquire more about what Keith had found but all she could say was, "I...I need to sit down." She turned suddenly and hastened back down the corridor the way she had come. Keith, blinking in confusion followed suit.

"Lindsey we need to talk about this!" He insisted.

"Did...did they find anybody else?" She asked, not bothering to look at him as she continued down the hallway. She could feel her eyes stinging but she wouldn't let herself cry.

"No," Keith said, panting in his efforts to keep up with her. "Both their sons were gone...we found some blood in the youngest kid's room but it was just spatter from the other crime scenes."

Somewhat relieved Lindsey slowed her pace but still her heart was hammering in her chest. "Signs of forced entry?" She asked him tersely.

"That's the thing," Keith explained, looking relieved that she'd slowed down, "the front door was unlocked with the house key and there was no sign of much of a struggle from either of the victims..."

Lindsey opened her mouth, about to ask him if they had found any signs of Dexter and Mickey when she stopped in her tracks. They had returned to the waiting area by this time and there, sitting to the edge of the seats in a blood stained costume was Mickey Morris, cradling his little brother who was wrapped securely in a starry blanket and sleeping contentedly in his big brother's arms.

Lindsey stood frozen, her mind screaming at her. There was walking evidence sitting quite at ease feet from her and looking as contented as a cow in a green pasture. Keith, having also noticed Mickey, grabbed her by the arm and pulled her back into the corridor.

"I know you're tight with the kid," Keith said in a hurried, hushed whisper, "but Lindsey this looks pretty bad on him."

"It...it could have been Michael for all we know," Lindsey said, her mouth moving despite what the rational part of her brain was telling her.

"Okay," Keith said nodding in agreement, "the rest of us on the scene considered that. When do you figure the son of a bitch went down?"

"I...I don't remember," Lindsey said, her eyes darting back to the waiting room where Mickey was still sitting with Dexter in his lap. The two boys looked so peaceful and she had never seen Mickey happier than when he was with his baby brother...it wasn't entirely a bad thing that they no longer had to put up with their monstrous parents...

"Not good enough sheriff," Keith said. "We need corroboration. Maybe if we can question Mickey..."

"No!" Lindsey said sharply and Keith looked startled at her sudden return to her usual briskness. "That boy has been through the ringer tonight," she told him, "and I'm not going to allow anyone badgering him."

"But...Lindsey!" Keith said incredulously as she started back to the waiting area. But once again she stopped short just before getting to the cluster of seats. She was an officer of the law. It was her job to make sure justice was upheld and any personal connections to suspects had to be put on the back burners. She had to make sure that the law did it's job, even if she wasn't sad to hear about the bloody ends of Alan and Olivia.

"Lindsey," Keith hissed in a voice barely above a whisper, "if it was Myers then it was Myers and that's all there is to it but if stories don't start adding up we're going to have to look at the possibility that...that Mickey killed his parents. It's not like this is the first time this has happened in this town."

Lindsey kept her eyes on the kid who was looking lovingly down at his slumbering brother.

"Right," she replied. "Of course...there's also the possibility that it was just a home invasion."

"With the front door key!" Keith said in a disbelieving voice. "C'mon Lindsey that's a little out there."

"Well...don't rule it out," she replied softly, her eyes still not leaving Mickey, silently imploring him to look up. If she could just look into his eyes again and see sparkling green and not empty black then she would know for certain that he was innocent.

"Well if it wasn't Michael and it wasn't Mickey then who was it?" Keith asked her insistently.

Lindsey didn't answer, still staring at Mickey. He had to be innocent...just had to be.

Mickey finally looked up and Lindsey felt her heart flutter in her chest as their eyes met. They were green for the briefest of moments but then something changed. Whether it was a trick of the light or a strand of the kid's hair casting shadows on his face or something deeper Lindsey didn't know but something about Mickey's eyes changed, making them dark and hollow...and lethal. In that instant Lindsey understood with awful finality exactly what must have happened after he had left the gym and what would happen if she or anyone else dared to separate Mickey from those that he loved, a fate shared by his parents and even Michael.

"Lindsey!" Keith snapped, his patience finally at it's limit, "who was it?" And incredulous sneer came over his face and he added, "Was it the boogeyman?"

"Yes," Lindsey replied with a defeated sigh, her eyes still on Mickey as he looked back down at Dexter, "as a matter of fact...it was."

End

file.